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JUNE 2019

NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZEN & FOREIGN TRIBUNALS
DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2019
INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES
ECONOMIC REFORMS 2.0
CREATING A WELFARE STATE

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PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?

This is the **49th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **JUNE 2019** which can be accessed from **https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/**

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Must Read and Connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.
- Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- **https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/**

"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."

Contents

HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY 7

Ambubachi Mela, Assam 7

POLITY/GOVERNANCE 8

All states, union territories can now set up Foreign Tribunals 8
Lateral Entry in Bureaucracy 8
PM Modi invites chiefs of all parties to deliberate upon 'one nation, one election' 10
Simultaneous Elections: Pros and Cons 10
Qualifying for Leader of the Opposition 12
Securing neutrality and security of tenure for the Speaker 14
President's rule for 6 more months in J&K 15

SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE 17

Creating a Welfare State 17
Indian Education system: Rote learning 19
Uptick for India on sanitation in UN report 20
India to be most populous by 2027: UN 21
India placed on 'Tier 2' in Human trafficking report 22
The debate on Bihar tragedy: Reasons behind 23
Cabinet nod for wage code Bill likely 25
'Healthy States, Progressive India: Report 25
31.4% of Indian children will be stunted by 2022: report 27
State of Indian prisons 28
Redefining & Rethinking Poverty 29
Basic rights for all 31

WOMEN/CHILDREN ISSUE 34

Declining female employment 34
Women Empowerment in New India 35
Justice that heals: Why cases under POCSO law should deploy restorative justice 37
'SHE Team' on the patrol in Odisha 38

HEALTH ISSUE 41

Importance of Yoga 41

ILS develops antibodies against Chikungunya infection 43
Mortality malady 43
Universal access to public healthcare 45

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES 47
NREGA 3.0: Part I 47
Better implementation of the Right to Education Act 48
The draft National Education Policy, 2019 51
In the absence of good law 53
Centre set to roll out 'Jal Shakti' scheme for water-starved areas 55

INTERNATIONAL 57
Quad one way to fix regional issues: Australian envoy 57
India to actively curb 'conflict' diamonds 57
Global Peace Index 2019 58
U.S. wants fair and reciprocal trade with India, says State Department 59
FATF warns Pak., but keeps it off the blacklist 59
Developing a shared vision for SDGs in South Asia 60
Pompeo to pave way for Modi-Trump meet 63
'Iran made a very big mistake by shooting down U.S. drone'- Trump 63
Weathering the incoming geopolitical storm 65
Data Protection: Importance, Global debate, India's stand 67
54 nations back India for UNSC non-permanent seat 69
India and U.S. resolve to work through their trade differences 70
Meetings on the Sidelines of G20 71

INDIA AND THE WORLD 74
India and RCEP 74
Reviving SAARC 75
Foreign Policy Challenges 77
Modi, Xi meet in Bishkek, agree to speed up boundary talks 80
Bishkek lessons 80
India and Middle East 81
Modi, Imran exchange pleasantries at Bishkek 83
PM hits out at trade protectionism; Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 84
India to impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 American goods 84
Bhutan on relations with India and China 85

ECONOMY 87

Economic Reforms 2.0 87
Structural reforms for tackling economic slowdown 89
The Nandan Nilekani panel on deepening digital payments 90
SEBI mulls norms to reward whistle-blowers 92
Full disclosure: On SEBI norm for financial disclosure 93
Jalan panel report on RBI reserves 94
UK Sinha Panel on MSMEs 94
Govt makes changes to Employees State Insurance Scheme 96
A case for balanced BITs 97
Banks' association tweaks inter creditor agreement 99
Creating a valuable economy 99
'Defaulter count in PSBs has risen 60% since FY15' 100
Strengthening Fiscal Federalism 101
Cash in circulation fell post note ban: FM 103

AGRICULTURE 104
Agri Reforms 2.0 104
Indian Agriculture: Improving global competitiveness 105
Over 12,000 suicide deaths by farmers in three years: Maharashtra 106

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION 109
Sportswear giant set to tap Indian firms' PET project to cut virgin plastic use 109
Reversing the scale of priorities: Balancing Sustainable development 110
G20 agrees to tackle ocean plastic waste 112
The mysterious case of GM Brinjal cultivation 112
India to host UN meet on land degradation in September 113
Bitcoin use causing huge CO2 emissions: Study 114
A water clinic for elephants opens on the banks of the Yamuna 115
Water Crisis in the making 116
Himalayan glaciers are melting twice as fast since 2000: study 117
WHO writes new prescription to prevent misuse of antibiotics 117

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS 119
Asiatic Golden cat wears new colours 119
Assam temple bids adieu to rare turtle hatchlings 119

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY 122
Making India energy robust 122
The 5G Wave 124

TRAI asked to revisit spectrum auction recommendations 126
Kaleshwaram project inaugurated in Telangana 127
India's first solar cruise vessel to be rolled out soon 127

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 129
New agency to develop space warfare weapon systems 129
Amitabh's Twitter data put on dark web 129
India will have its own space station, says ISRO chief Sivan 130
Libra is Facebook's cryptocurrency 131
Cancer cell detection 'dots' developed from coal 131
Scientists decode genome of 'miracle plant' 132
India as a space power 132
75 student satellites may fly to space as India turns 75 134
National mission on natural language translation soon 135
NASA to send a drone to Saturn's largest moon 135

DISASTER MANAGEMENT 137
Funding Disaster Management 137

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY 139
Defence Preparedness in India 139
DRDO conducts maiden test of hypersonic technology demonstrator 141
Navy to build 6 submarines 141
Police station in Satara tops SMART police survey 142

PERSON IN NEWS 144

MISCELLANEOUS 144

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE) 146
2019 JUNE MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS 153

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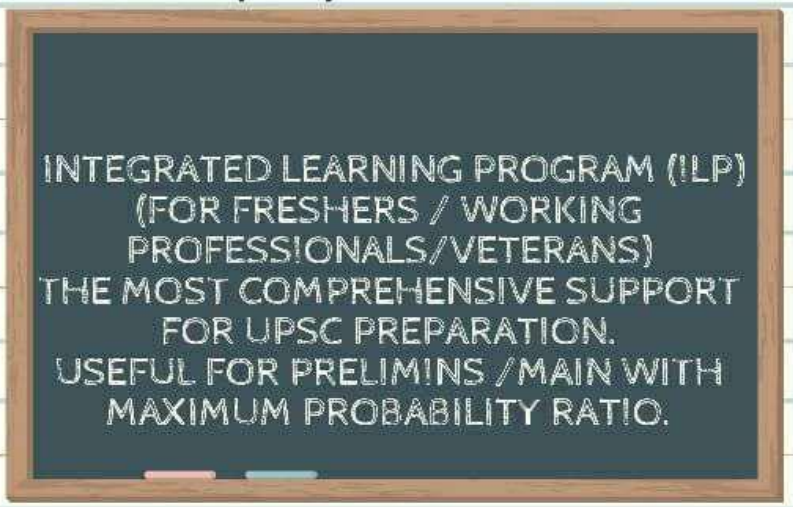

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HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

Ambubachi Mela, Assam

Part of Prelims and Mains GS I Art and culture

In news

A floating replica of the historic Kamakhya Temple, installed on the Brahmaputra river on the occasion of the annual four-day Ambubachi Mela at Amingaon, near Guwahati.PTI
https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareImage?Pictureid=G2V625R7S.3

Do you know?

- The Ambubachi Mela is an annual Hindu mela held at Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam. This yearly mela is celebrated during the monsoon season that happens to fall during the Assamese month Ahaar, around the middle of June .
- It is the celebration of the yearly menstruation course of goddess Kamakhya. It is believed that the presiding goddess of the temple, Devi Kamakhya, the Mother Shakti, goes through her annual cycle of menstruation during this time stretch.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

All states, union territories can now set up Foreign Tribunals

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS Paper II Polity

In News

- In the backdrop of updation process of National Register of Citizen in Assam, Ministry of Home Affairs has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964.

Amendments:

- The amended order has empowered District Magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not. Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.
- The amended Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019 also empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals.

Do you Know?

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

- National Register of Citizens, 1951 was a register prepared after the conduct of the Census of 1951.
- Any citizens whose does not find his/her name in NRC shall be considered as foreigner under Foreigner's Act, 1946 and shall be liable for deportation.
- NRC regards all migrants who have come to India after March, 24, 1971 as illegal irrespective of their religion. Such illegal immigrant needs to be deported back to their home country as per Assam Accord

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Lateral Entry in Bureaucracy

In news:

- After selection of nine lateral entrants as joint secretaries in various ministries/departments on contract basis, the government plans to extend such

induction of private sector domain experts to the lower-level deputy secretary and director posts as well.

- The Department of Personnel & Training has been tasked with opening up as many as 400 posts — out of the 1,300-odd at these levels under the Central Staffing Scheme — for lateral hiring.
- If implemented, this would constitute the single biggest reform of public administration in independent India.

Need:

- The current administrative system, wherein top positions are manned by career bureaucrats having little specialised knowledge and recruited through a common civil services examination, has outlived its utility.\
  A liberalised economy requires not generalists, but people who understand industrial processes and new technologies, taxation, finance, trade and investment in a dynamic, globalised setting.
- Even the old "steel frame" model of governance needs revisiting in favour of more nimble, entrepreneurial public service organisations focusing on performance and delivery by incorporating private sector management practices.
- The jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none approach to public administration needs to be dispensed with and is, indeed, an unfinished task of reforms and liberalisation. It also fits into the "minimum government, maximum governance". There can be no better means to achieving that goal than by deepening expertise and expanding the scope of lateral appointments in government.

Going forward:

- The process of selecting candidates for lateral entry, which has to be transparent, robust and credible. Filling 400 posts without conducting formal competitive exams can invite legal challenges, more so if they are seen to be at the expense of the "natural" All-India or Central Civil Services claimants to these jobs.
- Striking a balance between merit and ensuring adequate representation for disadvantaged communities is necessary even in a regime of lateral entry.
- Alternatively the "generalists" can be turned into "specialists" through mid-career professional development programmes or extended tenures in particular departments/fields.

Connecting the dots:

- Lateral entry once implemented would constitute the single biggest reform of public administration in independent India. Comment.

PM Modi invites chiefs of all parties to deliberate upon 'one nation, one election'

Part of: Prelims and mains GS II: Polity and governance

In news

- Ahead of the first session of the 17th Lok Sabha, Mr. Modi addressed leaders of the Opposition at an all-party meeting.
- An all-party meeting is a customary procedure before the beginning of every session of Parliament to ensure its smooth functioning.
- The meeting has been called to discuss "one nation, one election" issue, celebrations of 75 years of India's Independence in 2022 and 150 years of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary this year.

Simultaneous Elections: Pros and Cons

In news:

- Not even a month after the world's largest elections in history were over, the debate around "one nation, one election" has been resurrected.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had continued to flag the issue for the last five years, has now called for a meeting on the subject with leaders of other political parties.
- The Law Commission had recommended simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and the local bodies as far back as in 1999.
- The matter was examined by a Parliamentary Standing Committee in December 2015, and was also referred to the Election Commission of India (EC). Both supported it in principle.

Merits in the idea:

- It is becoming more and more difficult to contest elections. The 2019 general election was the most expensive on record; a whopping Rs. 60,000 crore was reportedly spent on the whole exercise. Given that there is no cap on the expenditure incurred by political parties, they spend obscene amounts of money in every election. It is argued that simultaneous elections would help reduce this cost.
- Frequent elections hamper the normal functioning of the government and disrupt civic life. This happens because the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into operation as

soon as the EC announces the election dates. This means that the government cannot announce any new schemes during this period. This results in what is often referred to as a policy paralysis.

The government cannot make any new appointments or transfer/ appoint officials. The entire government manpower is involved in the conduct of elections.

- Having simultaneous Parliament, Assembly, civic and Panchayat polls once every five years and completed within a month or so would save money, resources and manpower.
- Elections are the time when communalism, casteism and corruption are at their peak. Frequent elections mean that there is no respite from these evils at all.

The hurdles:

- How will "one nation, one election" work in case of premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha, for instance, as happened in late 1990s when the House was dissolved long before its term of five years was over? In such an eventuality, would we also dissolve all State Assemblies?

  Similarly, what happens when one of the State Assemblies is dissolved? Will the entire country go to polls again?

  This sounds unworkable both in theory and in the practice of democracy.
- Frequent elections ensure that the politicians have to show their faces to voters regularly. The most important consideration is undoubtedly the federal spirit, which, inter alia, requires that local and national issues are not mixed up.

Going forward:

Suggestions to deal with the problems that arise due to frequent elections.

- The problem of uncontrolled campaign expenditure:

  1. Introducing a cap on expenditure by political parties.

  2. State funding of political parties based on their poll performance also is a suggestion worth considering.

  3. Private and corporate fund collection may be banned.
- The poll duration can be reduced from two-three months to about 33 to 35 days if more Central armed police forces can be provided.

  Violence, social media-related transgressions and issues related to the enforcement of the MCC which are unavoidable in a staggered election will vanish if the election is conducted in a single day.

Conclusion:

It is undeniable that simultaneous elections would be a far-reaching electoral reform. If it is to

be implemented, there needs to be a solid political consensus, and an agenda of comprehensive electoral reforms should supplement it.
The pros and cons need to be appropriately assessed and practical alternatives sincerely considered.

Connecting the dots:

- The ongoing debate on simultaneous elections is useful as it could result into other reforms to cleanse the electoral process. Analyze.
- It is undeniable that simultaneous elections would be a far-reaching electoral reform. The pros and cons need to be appropriately assessed and practical alternatives sincerely considered. Comment.

Qualifying for Leader of the Opposition

Background

With the formation of the 17th Lok Sabha, the question of a formally recognised Opposition party and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) of the Lok Sabha under the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977, will arise. The Act extends to LoPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

What is Leader of Opposition?

- Opposition party and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) of the Lok Sabha is appointed under the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977.
- The 1977 Act defines LoP as that member of the House who is the "Leader in that House of the party in opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Chairman of the Council of States or the Speaker of the House of the People, as the case may be."
- The Act extends to LoPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha the same official status, allowances and perks that are admissible to Cabinet Ministers.

Appointment of Leader of opposition

- In the case of the Lok Sabha, this is subject to recognition of the leader by the Speaker. The Speaker's decisions in this regard have so far been determined by Direction 121(c) which laid down one of the conditions for recognition of party or group as having "at least a strength equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House, that is one-tenth of the total number of members of the House".

- The Leaders and Chief Whips of Recognised Parties and Groups in Parliament (Facilities) Act, 1998 also refers to a recognised party in the Lok Sabha as a party that has not less than 55 members.
- It is important to note that the single party and not an alliance must meet the 10% seat criteria in this regard.

Significance of Leader of opposition

- A party might not be able to form the government at the center because of the lack of majority, but that doesn't take away the responsibility of acting as a watchdog of the ruling party. For a healthy Parliamentary democracy it is always considered essential that there should be a strong opposition, which should always be in a position to saddle itself in authority.
- The incumbent should offer constructive criticism of government policies. He/she has to ensure that House proceeds expeditiously and holds adequate debate on pressing issues.

Recommendations for improvement

- In order to get the designation as the Opposition party, the party must have secured at least 10% of the total number of seats in the parliament. Thus the "party" should be replaced 'party or pre-poll alliance'.
- Pre-poll alliances have credibility and legitimacy the President and Governors while deciding on who to call first for forming the government in cases where no party secures a clear majority support in the House, move to call pre-poll alliance.

Proposed benefits

- It has the potential for the growth of a sound two- or three-party (or alliance) system. It could end the present system of having more than 2,000 parties being registered with the Election Commission.
- It may provide for candidates of an alliance contesting on a common symbol and an agreed common minimum programme with only national alliances or parties contesting for the Lok Sabha.

Connecting the dots:

- Considering the importance of role played by the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, do you think there is need to modify eligibility criteria for recognition of leader of opposition?

Securing neutrality and security of tenure for the Speaker

Background:

A watchful Parliament forms the foundation of a well-functioning democracy. The presiding officers of Parliament are the key to securing the effectiveness of this institution. The MPs look to the presiding officers (Speaker in LS and Chairman in RS) to facilitate debate, protect their rights and uphold the dignity of Parliament.

Importance of securing neutrality and security of tenure:

- The primary challenge before the Speaker is to conduct the proceedings of the Lok Sabha free from disruptions. To do so, the Speaker will have to earn the trust of the Members of Parliament: One way to earn the trust of MPs will be by being neutral, both in practice and perception while running the House.
- With no security in the continuity of office, the Speaker is dependent on his or her political party for reelection. This makes the Speaker susceptible to pulls and pressures from her/his political party in the conduct of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha.

Securing the neutrality of the Speaker:

It is a question that experts in India have been grappling with for 60-plus years.

- In his 1952 acceptance speech as Speaker of the first Lok Sabha, G V Mavalankar said: "We have yet to evolve political parties and healthy conventions about Speakership, the principle of which is that, once a Speaker he is not opposed by any party in the matter of his election, whether in the constituency or in the House, so long as he wishes to continue as Speaker."
- In 1951 and 1953, the Conference of Presiding Officers of legislatures in India passed a resolution for the adoption of the British Convention. It was unable to make much headway.

British Convention:

In Britain, the promise of continuity in office for many terms is used to ensure the Speaker's impartiality.

- By convention, political parties (usually) do not field a candidate against the Speaker at the time of general elections.
- The Speaker can continue in office, until deciding otherwise.
- The Speaker also gives up the membership of his/her political party.

Conclusion:

Maintaining neutrality of speaker towards all the political parties and securing his/her tenure is

a reform long due. The government should re-think on introducing the British convention. Speaker needs to be vigilant to defend the sanctity of the institution and also have the vision to strengthen it. In this challenging journey, the guiding light should be the Constitution and the rules of procedure of Lok Sabha.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the importance of **securing neutrality and security of tenure for the Speaker in Lok Sabha.**

President's rule for 6 more months in J&K

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Polity and Governance

In news

- The Lok Sabha on 28 June 2019 approved the extension of President's rule in Jammu and Kashmir for another six months, beginning July 3.
- The democratic, free and fair Assembly elections will be held in the State by the year-end.

Do you know?

President's rule

- According to Article 356 of the constitution, President's rule can be imposed in a state "if a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the constitution."
- In other states, the Centre invokes Article 356 to impose President's rule.

Governor's Rule in J&K

- In Jammu and Kashmir the failure of governmental function results in Governor's rule under Section 92 of the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir. The Governor later obtains the consent of the President of India.
- It is only when the Governor's rule is not revoked for six months that the President's rule is imposed in the state under Article 356.
- In Governor's rule, lawmaking power, financial power, budgetary sanction, all these powers are with the Governor. Once President's rule is imposed, lawmaking power is transferred to the parliament; the Budget is also passed by Parliament.

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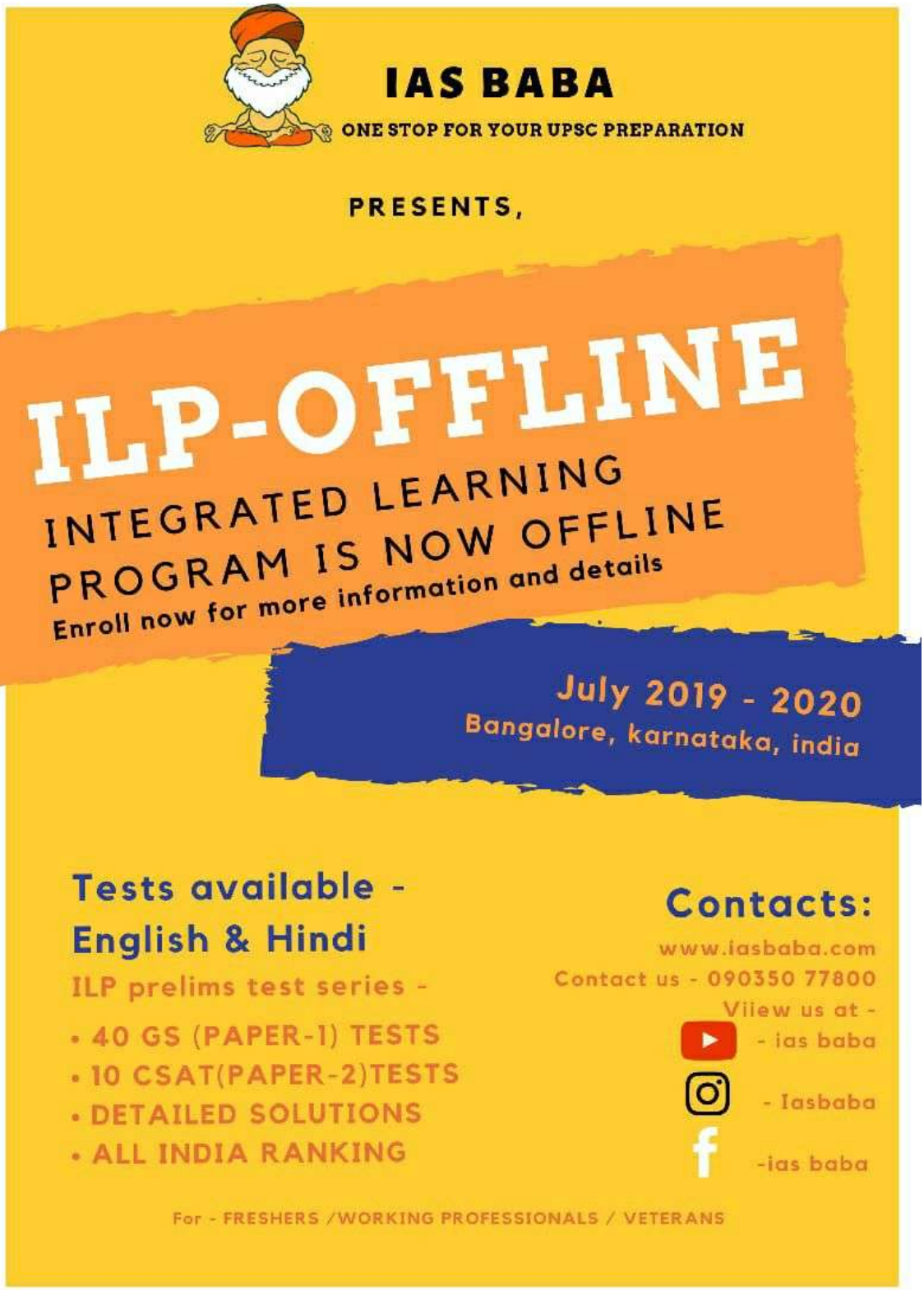


SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Creating a Welfare State

Background:

- Housing, sanitation, gas connections (Ujjwala), direct benefit transfers (DBT), income support (PM-Kisan) —were few of the welfarist programmes launched by the last government.
- In their implementation, these schemes had ambitious targets, tight centralised monitoring and outreach resulting in an accelerated pace of activity. But they also brought to the fore deeply contested questions about the architecture of the welfare state, its functions and capability.
- The effectiveness of welfare policy will rest on the government's willingness to invest in building state capacity.

Building a competent welfare bureaucracy:

- Targeted programmes like PM-Kisan require bureaucrats to identify eligible beneficiaries. To do this, critical data like land records and socio-economic caste census needs to be regularly updated and disputes between claims of citizens and official records should be negotiated.
- Getting the DBT architecture right requires bureaucrats to engage citizens and coordinate across departments — a skill that Indian bureaucrats simply do not possess.
- Countries like Brazil and Mexico have invested in large cadres of social workers at the local government level to do just this. But in the rush to bypass bureaucrats through DBT and transfer cash directly into bank accounts, this crucial investment has been ignored.

Solution:

The success of welfare programmes in Modi 2.0 will depend on willingness to recognise that building a competent welfare bureaucracy, even if it's only task is to move money, will require empowering local governments with skills and resources.

Active citizen participation:

- Responsive governments require active citizen participation.

- Digitised efficiency risks casting citizens as passive recipients of government largesse rather than active claimants of rights.
- Digitised welfare systems genuinely risk closing off spaces for citizens to complain, protest and demand accountability when rights are denied.

Solution:

A balance needs to be struck between efficiency gains through centralised control and responsiveness through decentralised, citizen-centric governance.

Health sector:

- With Ayushman Bharat, a significant step was taken towards an architectural shift in India's welfare system, away from direct provisioning towards financing citizens and regulating private providers.
- But can a state that struggles with routine tasks regulate a sector as complex as healthcare? The staffing requirement, in Uttar Pradesh alone, would amount to 10,000 employees.
- Importantly, in a sector like health where predatory practices are rife, well-functioning government hospitals are a necessary check and balance. Regulation cannot be a substitute for investing in public systems. Ayushman Bharat must be complemented with a concerted focus on strengthening public hospitals.

Flexibility to States:

The multiplicity of central schemes has served to entrench a silo-driven, one-size-fits-all approach that is inefficient as it fails to capture state-specific needs.

- Addressing overlaps and complementarities within existing schemes needs to be checked.
- The World Bank's social protection analysis calls for developing a national social protection strategy with a core basket of schemes that states can adapt to their needs.
- Greater flexibility to states was also recommended by the Niti Aayog's chief ministers sub committee report in 2016.

Implementing these recommendations will require a radical shift in the role of the central government away from designing and controlling schemes to strategic thinking and supporting states.

Resolving India's learning crisis:

The newly-released national education policy emphasises the urgent need to ensure all students achieve foundational literacy and numeracy. This needs to be adopted and implemented in mission mode.

Conclusion:

India doesn't need new schemes, rather it needs consolidation and balancing between competing welfare strategies. Getting this right will require significant investments in state capacity.

Connecting the dots:

- In order to create a welfare state it is must that the government invests in building state capacity. Elucidate.

Indian Education system: Rote learning

Background:

The importance accorded to school-leaving examinations in India puts enormous pressure on students to score the highest possible marks. Bagging a rank among lakhs of students is accepted widely as a mark of excellence. But how scientific is the examination system at determining the progress of students?

Exam system in India:

- The first mention of the educational system being throttled by exams was in 1904 in the Indian Educational Policy, at the time formulated by the Governor General in Council. After that this was mentioned in every commission and report.
- As far as reliability of children's understanding, acquiring knowledge and ways of formulating knowledge are concerned, the examination system doesn't leaves much scope. Children do acquire snippets of information, but whether they construct that into knowledge remains seriously doubtful.

Steps taken:

- A recent attempt made in the Right to Education (RTE) Act to introduce Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was an important step but this was not welcomed by a large number of schools and State authorities.
- The idea that the RTE introduced — that we will not have a Board examination up to Grade 8 — has now been amended by Parliament. States are now once again free to introduce a Board exam. Some have already moved towards that by reintroducing at Grade 5 and Grade 8 levels an exam that can classify children into pass and fail categories.

Compared with other countries:

- European systems, including the British system on which we were modelled originally, have moved on to far more holistic and humanistic ways of assessing each child's own growth trajectory right from the beginning. Even where there are public exams, they are taken with much greater care for objectivity and justice for every child. The GCSE [General Certificate of Secondary Education] in Britain, for example, makes sure that each child's work and performance gets a fair chance to be assessed properly by more than one evaluator.
- The assessment systems in Finland, the U.K., and some States in the U.S.- A kind of continuous assessment which feeds back into the teaching-learning process and a kind of taking care of the child's continuous progress is in place.
- In the public exam, the questions are on concepts, critical thinking and various ways of looking at the avenues of knowledge, and [there are] criteria for judging the veracity of that knowledge. Our emphasis is on speedy reproduction of information. I

Conclusion:

Two things needs to be reformed— the structure of the school and the curriculum. An alternative way should be found to ameliorate the high competition in the parents' mind. There is a possibility of reforming the system in such a manner that it is more insightful and less stressful.

Connecting the dots:

- The Indian examination system is hardly scientific at determining the progress of students. Comment.

Uptick for India on sanitation in UN report

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS II health and welfare, public services and governance

In news:

- According to joint moitoring report by UNICEF and WHO, India has made great gains in providing basic sanitation facilities since the start of the millennium, accounting for almost two-thirds of the 650 million people globally who stopped practicing open defecation between 2000 and 2017.

Report card of India:

- With regard to sanitation, India's record has been better. The country is responsible for almost single-handedly dragging the world towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal of ending open defecation.
- The millions of new toilets which mark the progress of the Swachh Bharat mission are producing large amounts of solid and liquid waste that India simply does not have the ability to treat and dispose of safely. Only 30% of the country's waste water is treated at plants providing at least secondary treatment, in comparison to an 80% global average.
- There has been absolutely no growth in the population with access to piped water facilities over that period, while large inequalities remain between rural and urban areas.

India's way ahead:

- Swachh Bharat programme had four reasons for its success that we can share with the rest of the world: political leadership, public financing, partnerships and people's participation.
- Solid and liquid waste management will be the focus of Swachh Bharat phase 2.
- The contours of a new scheme, tentatively called **Nal Se Jal**, are being drafted.

India to be most populous by 2027: UN

Part of: Prelims and mains GS I: Population, GS III international relation

In news:

UN World Population Prospects 2019 report released. Accoring to report, India is set to overtake China as the most populous country by 2027.

Findings of the UN report

Demographic dividend:

- India will have almost 1.64 billion inhabitants by 2050.
- Moving from geographical areas to age cohorts, India is still among the countries where the working-age population (25-64 years) is growing faster than other groups, creating an opportunity for accelerated economic growth.
- However, the "demographic dividend" will peak by 2047 in South Asian region, meaning that countries such as India must rush to invest in education and health, especially for young people.

Pressure on social protection system:

- Globally, people aged above 65 are the fastest growing age group, putting pressure on social protection systems as the proportion of the working-age population shrinks.
- By 2050, one in six people will be above 65, compared with one in 11 people in 2019.

Population growth rate:

- While India may have the highest absolute increase in numbers, its rate of growth is slowing.
- The rate of population growth is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where the fertility rate stand at 4.6 births per woman over a lifetime. The sub-Saharan African region is expected to double its population by mid-century.

India placed on 'Tier 2' in Human trafficking report

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS II International reports, Policies affecting weaker sections of the society

In news

The U.S. State Department has released its 2019 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, highlighting the need for action against domestic trafficking.

The national nature of trafficking (Based on ILO data):

- In 77% of the cases, victims are trafficked within their own countries of residence, rather than across borders.
- Victims of sex trafficking were more likely to be trafficked across borders while victims of forced labour were typically exploited within their own countries.

The report categorises countries into three groups based on the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), U.S. legislation, based on efforts to meet minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking viz. Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3.

India continued to be placed in Tier 2 on the country trafficking scale.

Recommendations for India

- Amend the definition of trafficking in Section 370 of the Penal Code to include forced labour trafficking and ensure that force, fraud, or coercion are not required to prove a child sex trafficking offence.
- Establish Anti-Human Trafficking Units in all districts with funding and clear mandates.

The debate on Bihar tragedy: Reasons behind

In news:

- While Bihar loses hundreds of children to AES(Acute Encephalitis Syndrome) every year, there were sharp spikes in 2012 and 2014, when 395 and 372 children, respectively, lost their lives.
- Through the years, AES cases have been reported from several districts in Bihar: Gaya, Patna, Aurangabad, Saran, East Champaran, Sitamarhi and Vaishali. Encephalitis refers to an inflammation in the brain due to a viral or bacterial attack. It causes fever and almost never a drop in blood sugar.
- In the current epidemic, as well as in previous ones in Muzaffarpur, the doctors have marked cases of and deaths by hypoglycaemia (drop in blood sugar), which is unusual.

Possible reasons behind:

Ongoing heat wave:

It could be the ongoing heatwave — several parts of Patna, Gaya and even Muzaffarpur have recorded temperatures in excess of 4-5°C over what's normal for this time of the year. At least 80 people have succumbed to the heatwave. The added heat and humidity could have made young children particularly susceptible to dehydration.

Debating the litchi link:

Spike in AES cases and in fatalities can be a result of malnourished children suffering brain damage after eating litchis, particularly unripe or overripe ones.

In 2016, a detailed investigation, published in The Lancet Global Health by the National Centre for Disease Control, India, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found "confirmation" that litchis contained a chemical called **methylene cyclopropyl glycine (MCPG)**.

These are naturally occurring toxins that cause hypoglycaemia and metabolic derangement in children.

When a child is malnourished, her body, having exhausted its reserves of glucose from the digestive tract and the liver, typically turns to fatty acids in biochemical desperation to supply blood sugar to the brain. MCPG, the theory goes, blocked this mechanism. This can send the brain into hypoglycaemic shock triggering convulsions and, if unaddressed, even death.

Virus or biological agent:

Several parents of the ailing children have been categorical that their children did not eat litchis. If malnutrition and litchi consumption were the causes, then there ought to have been a fairly constant number of deaths every year. This has not been observed.

"A peak and an ebb in cases and deaths is what we see. And that's more typical of a biological agent."

Poor health record:

Irrespective of whether a biological agent or malnutrition is to blame, Bihar's poor track record in ensuring that the poorest have access to adequate nutrition and distrust in the public health care system are major causes for the deaths.

- Doctors in several primary health care centres are "afraid" of doing anything beyond the bare minimum to rescue a child. "Because the primary health care centres and health centres are located in a village or community, there's a greater chance of violence in case a child dies. Over the years, this has led to a lack of trust among people in their nearest health facility and they opt for tertiary care.
- Bihar's position at the bottom of national health indices makes novel diseases harder to detect and known diseases harder to treat.
  According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 2015-2016, 48% of children in Bihar were stunted, compared to the national average of 38%.
  Bihar also performed poorly in terms of its ability to spend and implement schemes that provided nutritious food to children and expectant mothers.
  Two-thirds of eligible children did not get healthy meals, the NHFS report noted.

Way ahead:

In 2016, a government-constituted committee prescribed guidelines:

- Children shouldn't be allowed to skip their evening meal, they should avoid stepping out in the heat.
- Local public healthcare centres must stock up on anti-convulsion drugs as well as dextrose.

These were adhered to in 2017 and 2018. And that's why there were relatively fewer reports of AES.

Treating it as a disaster:

The NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority) which was set up in 1999 has its brief to co-ordinate the response to "man-made and natural disasters". Muzaffarpur is facing a disaster which is partly natural and certainly aggravated by being man-made. But it does not qualify. "Disaster". Floods and earthquakes elicit immediate response, but not long epidemics or

drought. Muzaffarpur is a national tragedy, as much as the Gujarat earthquake was, or the Kerala floods and it should be treated as one.

Conclusion:
The debate on the underlying reason for so many deaths is an ongoing one. With a spike in deaths every year it is clear that the State has failed Muzaffarpur's children. It is time a scientific study is carried out and steps be taken accoridnly.

Connecting the dots:

- Bihar loses hundreds of children to AES (Acute Encephalitis Syndrome) every year. Discuss the possible reasons behind. Also comment on the challenges involved in tackling the issue.

Cabinet nod for wage code Bill likely

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Labour laws

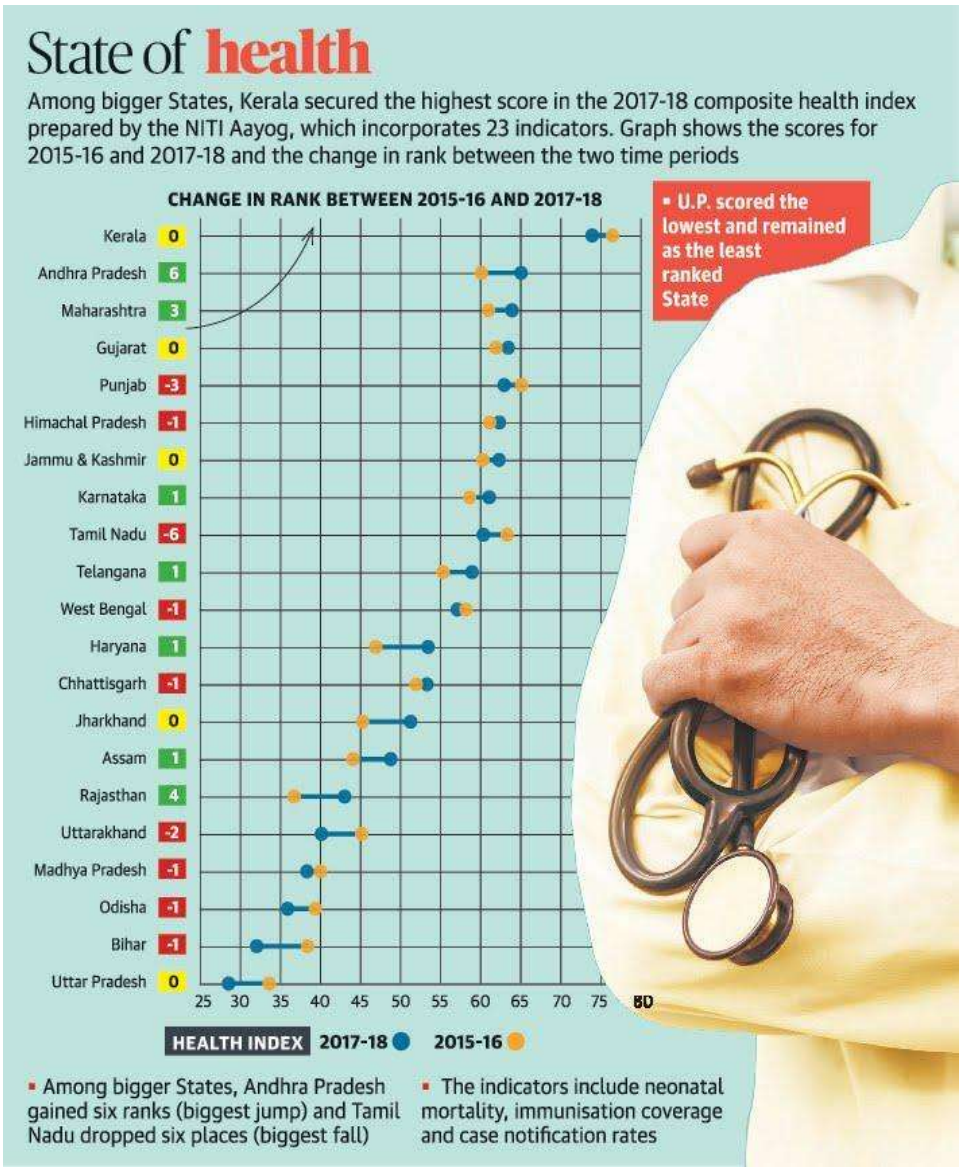
In news

- Looking to bring in a fresh wave of labour reforms, the Labour Ministry is likely to seek Cabinet approval for the Code on Wages Bill.
- The wage code Bill is one of four codes envisaged by the government which would subsume 44 labour laws with certain amendments.
- The four codes will deal with wages, social security, industrial safety and welfare, and industrial relations.

'Healthy States, Progressive India: Report

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Governance and public services

In news
The report 'Healthy States, Progressive India: Report on Rank of States and UTs' has ranked states in three categories — larger States, smaller States and UTs "to ensure comparison among similar entities".
The Index ranks the States and Union Territories based on 23 health-related indicators, including neonatal mortality rate, under-five mortality rate, etc.



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Findings of the report

- In Union Territories Chandigarh topped the list this year with a score of 63.62, followed by Dadra and Nagar Haveli at number 2 position with a score of 56.31. Dadra and Nagar Haveli was the worst performer last time with a score of 38.64.
- Lakshadweep, which topped the list last time, slipped to the third position, followed by Puducherry, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar, and Daman and Diu.
- Kerala continued to top the list for the best performing State in the health sector among the 21 large States, which got an overall score of 74.01, was followed by Andhra Pradesh (65.13), Maharashtra (63.99), Gujarat (63.52) and Punjab (63.01), Himachal Pradesh (62.41), Jammu and Kashmir 62.37, Karnataka (61.14) and Tamil Nadu (60.41).

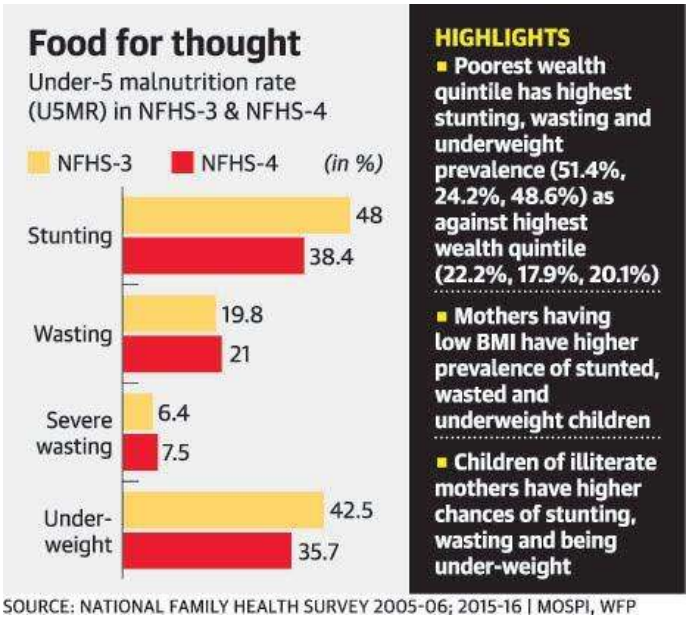
- Uttar Pradesh continued to be at the bottom of the list with its score falling to 28.61. Other States at the bottom of the list were Bihar (32.11), Odisha (35.97) and Madhya Pradesh (38.39).
- The report stated that only about half the States and UTs showeds an improvement in the overall score between 2015-16 (base year) and 2017-18 (reference year).

31.4% of Indian children will be stunted by 2022: report

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Governance and public services

In news

- Almost one in three Indian children under five years will still be stunted by 2022 going by current trends, according to an analysis of the country's food and nutrition security.
- India must double its rate of progress to reach the target of 25% by 2022.
- The report, which is a baseline analysis of the country's progress in achieving the second Sustainable Development Goal to end hunger, was prepared by the UN World Food Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.



Findings of the report:

- Country is self sufficient in food grain production but, unfortunately, the consumer's access to rice, wheat and other cereals has not increased at the same rate, due to population growth, inequality, food wastage and losses, and exports.
- The average per capita consumption of energy among the poorest 30% of the population is 1811 kilo calories, much lower than the norm of 2155 kilo calories per day.
- In States like Bihar (48%) and Uttar Pradesh (46%), almost one in two children are stunted, while it is only one in five children in Kerala and Goa (20% each).
- There are high rates of stunting among children in the poorest wealth quintile (51.4%), Scheduled Tribes (43.6%) and Scheduled Castes (42.5%), and children born to mothers with no education (51%).

State of Indian prisons

In news:

A data-driven report, **the Prison Statistics India 2016**, was published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recently.

The report raises a number of red flags signalling the rot in India's prison system.

Who are our prisoners?

- The report tells us that at the end of 2016, there were 4,33,033 people in prison; of them **68% were undertrials.**

  These are people who have yet to be found guilty of the crimes they are accused of. India's under-trial population remains among the highest in the world.
- There has been rise in the number of people held under administrative (or 'prevention') detention laws in Jammu and Kashmir (a 300% increase), with 431 detainees in 2016, compared to 90 in 2015.

  Administrative, or 'preventive', detention is used by authorities in J&K and other States to unfairly detain persons without charge or trial and circumvent regular criminal justice procedures.
- The 2016 report doesn't include demographic details of religion and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe status of prisoners, which are crucial to understanding India's prison population.

  The report of 2015, for instance, said that Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis accounted for 55% of the under-trial population even though they made up only 50% of the convict population and 38% of the total Indian population.

Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure:

The report records the number of prisoners eligible to be released and actually released, under **Section 436A** of the Code of Criminal Procedure. In 2016, out of 1,557 undertrials found eligible for release under Section 436A, only 929 were released.

Sec 436A allows undertrials to be released on a personal bond if they have undergone half of the maximum term of imprisonment they would have faced if convicted.

- Spreading awareness- Research by Amnesty India has found that prison officials are frequently unaware of this section and unwilling to apply it.
- In 2017, the Law Commission of India had recommended that undertrials who have completed a third of their maximum sentence for offences attracting up to seven years of imprisonment be released on bail.

Mental health concerns:

The number of "unnatural" deaths in prisons, which doubled between 2015 and 2016, from 115 to 231. The rate of suicide among prisoners also increased by 28%, from 77 suicides in 2015 to 102 in 2016.

The report states that there was only one mental health professional for every 21,650 prisoners in 2016, with only six States and one Union Territory having psychologists/psychiatrists. It is an indicator of the magnitude of mental health concerns within prisons.

Conclusion:

The report has important information which can be used to facilitate a dialogue on improving prison policies. It is essential to uncover torture and other forms of ill-treatment, increase transparency and balance the power asymmetry in prisons.

Connecting the dots:

- The Prison Statistics India 2016 report published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) presents a sorry state of Indian prisons. Discuss.

Redefining & Rethinking Poverty

Introduction:

According to the Tendulkar poverty line, poverty is today around 4.5 per cent of the population or less than 70 million.

According to the World Bank poverty line poverty in India is estimated at 31 per cent down from 57 per cent in 2011/12. There is a 26 ppt decline in poverty over six years.

Rethinking poverty:

- We are not a poor country any more, not with just 4.5 per cent of the population classified as poor (the Tendulkar poverty line of Rs 44 per person per day in 2017-18 prices).
- We have always considered food consumption as the ultimate criterion of poverty. Hence, we have built up an elaborate (too elaborate) ecosystem of food production, consumption, and distribution.
  Time has come to dismantle this ecosystem — an ecosystem that is biased against the poor farmer, against climate change mitigation and also against efficient use of water and energy.
- Poverty is now not just about food but living standards — sanitation, housing, piped water, electricity, education, health, and jobs. And on each of these elements, the focus should shift to quality, not quantity.
- Defining poverty in relative, not absolute terms.
  Most European nations have a relative definition of poverty — that is, a fixed proportion of the median income.

Contribution of the DBT system:

A large part of this decline took place due to better targeting of government programmes — made possible by expanded (and extensive) use of direct benefit transfers (DBT).
The direct benefit transfer mechanism has been able to resolve targeting problems for a bulk of the 430 government schemes and subsidies.

The current PM-Kisan programme that provides income support to approximately 14 crore farmers is an example of how, through DBT, the government can provide direct income support as its focal policy towards poverty alleviation.

Such a policy is likely to help in rationalising and consolidating poverty reduction programmes, thereby freeing up resources for other sectors in the economy.

Going forward:

Targeted basic income programme:

The new approach towards poverty alleviation should involve targeted income transfers.

The government can transfer the poverty gap (difference between per capita consumption of the household and the poverty line faced by the household) into the bank account of the poor.

The cost of such a programme is likely to be between Rs 2.5 and 3 trillion and it will ensure

nobody has a consumption below the poverty line. India's current expense on poverty alleviation programmes is approximately Rs 3.4 trillion.
A basic income programme is likely to cost substantially less that the current policies.

Bringing more people under the tax net at the higher income brackets:
To improve revenue realisation from direct taxes, the government should focus on improving compliance by reducing the highest slabs of the tax rate.
The Indian economy requires adequate investments in critical areas such as road, railways and water. Therefore, the government needs to rationalise its expenditure and tax rates to ensure reallocation of resources.

Conclusion:
Our pace of poverty reduction has improved over the last five years. We can augment this through a targeted basic income policy and free up resources for other sectors of the economy. Times have changed and so should our policies towards poverty alleviation.

Connecting the dots:

- While India has seen a great decline in poverty rates over last few years. It is time we rethink on the definition of poverty and on the policies intended to remove it. Comment.

Basic rights for all

What are basic needs?

- Needs are different from wants. You may want a chocolate every morning but don't *need* it. But basic needs are different: their non-fulfilment can cause great harm, even kill. The failure to get an antibiotic if you have a bacterial infection can hurt badly.
- Wants are subjective. Needs depend on the way human bodies are constituted. They are a solid necessity; one cannot get on without them. Nor can they be fulfilled by substitutes. For us, nothing can take the place of water, food and air.
- People suffer if basic needs are met inadequately or with delay. They are then denied a minimally decent life.

Elementary justice requires that before anything else, the state does everything at its disposal to satisfy all basic needs of its citizens, particularly of those who cannot fend for themselves.

What are Basic rights?

A right is something that is owed to us; it is not a favour. Basic rights are claims on the state to provide us with goods and services that satisfy our basic needs. When something is identified as a basic right, it puts the state under a duty to enable its exercise. The state becomes its guarantor. When society and government reneges on its commitment to do so, we hold them accountable.

Basic rights:

- The **right to minimum economic security and subsistence**, that includes clean air, uncontaminated water, nutritious food, clothing and shelter. Credible threats to these rights can be reduced by the government by establishing institutions and practices that assist the vulnerable; for example, by setting up hospitals with adequate number of doctors, nurses, beds, medical equipment, intensive care units, essential drugs and emergency treatments.
- Vulnerability, accountability- The **right to free public expression of helplessness** and frustration, if deprived of other basic rights. The right to make one's vulnerability public, be informed about the acts of commission and omission of the government regarding anything that adversely affects the satisfaction of basic needs, to critically examine them and to hold state officials publicly accountable is a basic right on a par with right to physical security and subsistence and inseparably linked to them.

What needs to be done:

- Like the constitutional principle of a basic structure, it is time to articulate an equally robust doctrine of basic rights.
- These basic rights must be viewed primarily as positive, rights not against interference *from* the state (negative rights) but *to* the provision of something by it.
- Just as individuals are punished for legal violations, the government of the day must also be punished for the violation of these basic rights. Defaulting governments must be held legally accountable. The systematic violation of basic rights must be treated on a par with the breakdown of constitutional machinery.

Conclusion:

The above basic rights can be summed up in a single phrase, the right to a minimally decent life. The point of having a threshold of minimal decency is that our life must not fall below a certain level of existence. Anything short of a minimally decent life is simply not acceptable.

Governments must be made accountable when they undermine the exercise of these basic rights.

Connecting the dots:

- What in your definition are basic needs? In order to fulfill these needs it is time to articulate an equally robust doctrine of basic rights. Critically analyse.

WOMEN/CHILDREN ISSUE

Declining female employment

In news:

It is a national tragedy that women unable to find work are dropping out of the labour force.

- As per labour force survey data, rural India is in the midst of a gender revolution in which nearly half the women who were in the workforce in 2004-5 had dropped out in 2017-18.
- The 61st round of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) recorded 48.5% rural women above the age of 15 as being employed either as their major activity or as their subsidiary activity — but this number dropped to 23.7% in the recently released report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

Reasons behind:

- Mechanisation and land fragmentation have reduced agricultural work opportunities for both men and women.
- Other work opportunities, except for work in public works programmes, are not easily open to women. This challenge is particularly severe for rural women with moderate levels of education.

  A man with class 10 education can be a postal carrier, a truck driver or a mechanic; these opportunities are not open to women.
- The 2017 Maternity Benefit Act cover only 8 per cent of the Indian organised sector workforce and left out 92 per cent of the unorganised and informal workers.

Way ahead:

- Establishment of the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development is a welcome move by the new government.

  It is to be hoped that this committee will take the issue of declining female employment as seriously as it does the issue of rising unemployment among the youth.
- One of the most powerful ways in which public policies affect rural women's participation in non-agricultural work is via development of transportation infrastructure that allows rural women to seek work as sales clerks, nurses and factory workers in nearby towns.

- An expansion in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme. Since MGNREGA is a self-targeted scheme, women looking for work would automatically look to enrol themselves in it.
- A further boost to female labour force participation could be provided by increasing wages for women in the MGNREGA scheme.

Conclusion:

We need to focus on multi-sectoral reforms that have a positive impact on women's work opportunities. The potential gender dividend could be far greater than the much celebrated demographic dividend.

Connecting the dots:

- Indian women unable to find work are dropping out of the labour force. Comment

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Women Empowerment in New India

Background:

As the government plans actions to transform India — and politics — it needs to pay more heed to women's field-voices and needs.

- For the first time ever, **a critical-half of voters constituted women**, near-parity to male numbers with many exhibiting independent decision-making in vote-casting. This outpouring — despite 20 million women claimed as missing from voters' lists — testifies to the maturity of women's political agency. It is a self-propelled contribution to nation-building, notwithstanding lack of adequate support to women's political contestation from any major political party.
- The 17th **Lok Sabha has the highest tally of women since Independence** — 78. This still amounts to a mere 14 per cent of 543 members.
- Further, as a recent study highlights, with the current rate of increase it will take 40 years for women to reach 33 per cent participation in Parliament/legislatures. (Thirty-three percent being the minimum threshold for critical-mass enabling gender impact.)

Way ahead:

- **The Women's Reservation Bill:**

Demands to revive and pass the Women's Reservation Bill are already making the rounds. The vision of 21st century New India needs women-leaders as harbingers of harmony and progress; gender-parity not fractional reservation.

- New India also needs to urgently put in place measures to reverse the massive drop in women's work-participation and threats to freedom of movement. A major issue identified by many pre-election surveys, perhaps a key propelling factor for voting in such large numbers, was the concern about physical security and safety.
- The plummeting work-force participation in past years, the resonating #MeTomovement, highlight growing insecurity for women in coming out onto the streets, in workplaces/public places, which are their birthright to access.
- Besides emphasising women's fundamental and constitutional right to dignity and security, bridging the gender gap in work-participation, according to a McKinsey estimate, would add $770 billion to the Indian economy by 2025. Naya India cannot be built unless women hold-up-half-the-sky.
- There is growing threat to women's personal and bodily integrity within homes and neighbourhoods. Building home-toilets was one key step towards women's physical security and it resonated. But cleansing the Internet and social media platforms of the pornography invading homes and turning fathers, brothers, sons, neighbours and of course, strangers into predators, is a burning issue yet left untracked. This is a national security-threat that requires prioritised strategic-action.
- Attention to women's issues, including equitable political representation, could spearhead other vital democratic reforms desperately required to cleanse the system of the unabashed growth of money-and-muscle-power, a principal inhibiting factor for women-contestants – and equally, less-muscular-moneyed-men — in the electoral process.

Conclusion:

Women's rights are fundamental human rights, not to be examined in silo fashion. A holistic, interconnected and intrinsically Indian vision cross-cutting sectors and issues needs articulation with time-bound implementation deadlines as a major national priority. It could become the global exemplar.

Connecting the dots:

- As the government plans actions to transform India — and politics — it needs to pay more heed to women's field-voices and needs. Comment.

Justice that heals: Why cases under POCSO law should deploy restorative justice

Introduction

A district court in Madhya Pradesh sentenced a person to death under the POCSO (Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences) Act was doing the rounds, research conducted by the Counsel to Secure Justice (CSJ) and National Law University Delhi (NLUD) offered significant insights.

Meaning of Justice

The meanings of "justice" tend to vary for the victim, offender, family, and community. The survivors or their families did not necessarily want the death penalty — or even strict punishment — for the accused. Rather, in many cases, they wanted the offenders to acknowledge their wrongdoing or tender an apology for their act.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is emerging as a powerful tool in the criminal justice process, especially with regard to conciliation and mediation. The concept involves bringing the victim and offender together to remedy the harm — it makes the offender accept his/her offence.

Restorative justice involves the victim, offender and the community in its quest for solutions, which are about repairing, reconciliation, and reassurance.

Punitive Justice

Punitive options, including the death penalty, are not the product of the concerns of victims or their families — they are notions of the state and therefore, driven by political considerations.

Punishment seldom matches with the idea of justice held by the victims, their families or the community. Victimisation leads to trauma, shame, insecurity, and several other social and emotional consequences.

The study revealed that families of victims often felt that the offenders usually do not experience any remorse or guilt even after undergoing the severest of punishments. The stakeholders in these communities felt that, apart from harsh punishment, measures like community service, education — or even treatment for the offender — and restorative programmes ought to be initiated.

Current justice system

The current justice system often ignores the need to restore relationships that were broken, because family members blamed victims and failed to support them. The aim of the criminal justice process ought to be the creation of peace and, more importantly, enabling the community to deal with the effects of crime — as well as preventing it.

Communities often perceive the system as corrupt, dismissive of the poor and insensitive towards victims and their families.

The study presents a powerful case for applying restorative justice, especially because re-victimisation and secondary victimisation, including discrediting crime victims during cross-examination, results in more harm than good — they discourage victims from reporting abuse. Victims believe that the system shares the society's victim-blaming culture.

POCSO and Restorative justice

In 90 per cent cases of child sexual abuse, the offender is not only known to the victim but is also a close relative. Many organisations worldwide have "victim offender reconciliation programmes" or "sentencing circles". These involve trained facilitators who make the parties discuss possible solutions by driving the offenders to own up to their offence.

A restorative justice approach would require the POCSO Act to concentrate on the victims' needs — material, financial, emotional and social. POCSO ought to recreate or restore a community that supports the rehabilitation of victims and offenders — and in doing so, prevent crime. Adoption of such strategies will also obviate the costs and delays associated with the current legal justice system.

Conclusion

Restorative justice programmes enable the victim, the offender and affected members of the community to be directly involved in addressing the situation that arises after a crime. They become central to the criminal justice process, with government officers and legal professionals serving as facilitators of a system that aims at offender accountability and reparation. This restorative process — that often involves face-to-face interactions between all parties — is a powerful way of addressing not only the material loss as a result of the crime, but the social and emotional trauma caused by it.

Connecting the dots:

- Restorative Justice versus Punitive justice: Which one side would you take? Justify your stand.

'SHE Team' on the patrol in Odisha

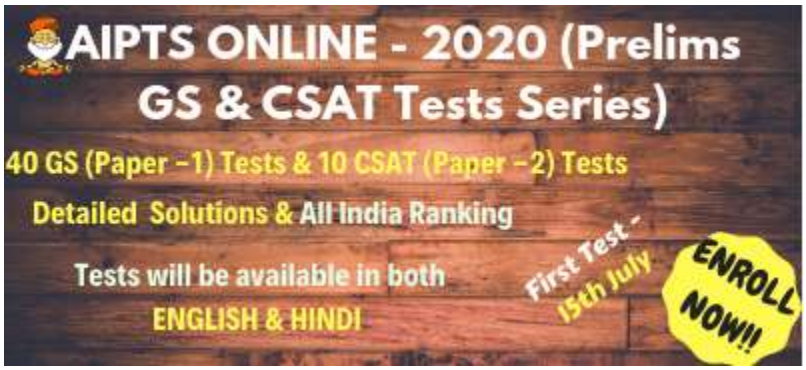
Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Polity and Governance

In news

'SHE Team', the innovative pilot project launched by Odisha's Gajapati district police to ensure safety and security of young girls and women.

About SHE Team

- SHE stands for 'Safety, Health and Environment'. This project is modelled on the lines of Hyderabad 'SHE Team'.
- The 'SHE Team' is headed by a lady sub-inspector and includes mobile patrolling teams. Four female and three male police personnel will assist her. They will patrol schools, colleges, other local institutions and public places, where young girls and women are allegedly subjected to eve teasing, stalking and harassment.
- The website of 'SHE Team' has been launched and a mobile app is under construction.
- 'SHE Team' will also try to prevent harassment of working women at workplaces and public places where they move for their job. It will teach self-defence and cyber space safety to young girls and children.
- It will visit child care institutions and make children aware about sexual abuse.



IASBABA'S OPTIONAL
SUBJECT COURSES
OPTIONALS CLASSROOM PROGRAMME
GEOGRAPHY
SOCIOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY
POLITICAL SCIENCE
KANNADA LIT.
TLP OPTIONALS TEST SERIES
GEOGRAPHY
SOCIOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY
POLITICAL SCIENCE
PUBLIC ADMIN

HEALTH ISSUE

Importance of Yoga

Introduction:

- As over 170 countries around the world celebrate the fifth International Yoga Day on June 21.
- Recognising that "yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being" and also that wider dissemination of information about the benefits of practising yoga would be beneficial for the health of people all over the world, the UN proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga via Resolution 69/131.
- Quite appropriately, the theme of the 2019 International Yoga Day is **"Climate Action"**.
- Establishment of the first India-China Yoga College at the Yunnan Minzu University in Kunming in China and the India-Turkmenistan Centre for Yoga and Traditional Medicine in Ashgabat,
- Turkmenistan are a few of the important first steps in the efforts to spread the benefits of yoga.

What is yoga?

- Practised in various forms around the world and continuing to grow in popularity, yoga is essentially an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India possibly around the 5th century BC.
- The word yoga comes from Sanskrit and means "to join" or "unite". The science of yoga joins different facets of human existence.
- The word was first mentioned in the Rigveda , but its philosophy, science and grammar were first provided by Patanjali in his magnum opus, Patanjali Yoga Sutra .

Importance of yoga:

Much more than a workout:

It is a comprehensive approach to achieve wellness. It recognises the vital connection between the body and the mind. It aims for balance and equanimity, peace, poise and grace. It is a sublime expression of the quest for excellence, for synthesis and harmony.

Maintaining the balance:

We are living in times of great challenges, of unprecedented change in unpredictable directions. The way we live, learn, work and enjoy is changing rapidly. Lifestyles are getting transformed through technology.

However, as the global community started drafting its development agenda in 2015, it realised that we have been missing a big component of "development". There was a need for balance.

- Need for caring for the poor.
- Need for caring for the planet.
- Need to look for gross national happiness in addition to gross national product.
- Need to avoid excesses, avoid reckless exploitation of nature, avoid excessive consumption. Our individual lifestyles and patterns of global governance needed to be rebooted.
- Sustainability has become the new mantra. "Balance" is at the heart of sustainability.

And that "balance" in all spheres starting with physical well-being is what yoga is all about. Yoga is an approach to life that focuses on physical balance, mental equilibrium and working towards a harmonious synthesis of diverse elements including the protection of the environment.

Effective ground for sustainability:

- Yoga is a way of thinking, a way of behaving, a way of learning and a way of problem-solving. It is a unique way of connecting ourselves with the external environment and generating positive synergies of thought and action. It creates stability, enhances ability and promotes conviviality. It can serve as an effective ground for sustainability.

All is one :

Yoga is something beyond physical health and material wealth. The human persona is not only a body; it is also a mind, an intellect, and a soul. Yoga attempts to harmonise all of them. Yoga means to join. Its ultimate goal is to experience the unity of individual and universal consciousness. Yoga teaches us to recognise the fundamental unity between human beings and humankind, humans and the environment, and ultimately recognise a total interconnectedness of everything. The essence of this realisation is to experience that all is one. There is no 'us' and 'they' — everything is us. This is an integral or holistic approach.

Conclusion:

Apart from emphasising the normal benefits of yoga, International Yoga Day should be utilised to think about how a peaceful transition can be achieved for peace, harmony and happiness.

Connecting the dots:

- Yoga is much more than a workout. Comment.

ILS develops antibodies against Chikungunya infection

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Science and Technology: Health

In news

The Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), which functions under the Department of Biotechnology, has entered into a non-exclusive license for product commercialisation after having successfully developed antibodies against the Chikungunya viral (CHIKV) infection.

Significant impact

It will help researchers unravel myriad aspects of virus pathogenesis. Moreover, with greater light shed upon the CHIKV infection biology using these antibodies, research communities are now a step closer to developing efficacious antivirals and other control strategies against the Chikungunya virus.

Mortality malady

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Governance and public health

In news

Mortality malady

In 1997, out of every 1,000 live births in India, 71 infants died before turning one. In 1997-2008, the figure reduced to 53 (-18), and between 2008 and 2017, it dropped to 33 (-20). The rate of reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)* has not improved much and the rural-urban gap too remains high across these two time periods in some States. By **Siddarth Rao T** and **Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

- The first three columns show IMR in 2017 and the reduction of IMR across two time periods. For instance, Odisha's 2017 IMR is relatively high compared to others and the change across the two periods has remained similar
- The next three columns show the urban-rural gap across time spans. States like Assam and Madhya Pradesh have a higher divide
- Shades of red indicate lower levels of improvement, while green shades indicate progress

Union territories were not considered. Some States did not have sufficient data

** Number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births*

Source: Sample Registration System

State	IMR 2017	IMR '97 - IMR '08	IMR '08 - IMR '17	IMR urban-rural ('97)	IMR urban-rural ('08)	IMR urban-rural ('17)
Goa	9	-9	-1	-	-	-
Kerala	10	0	-2	4	-2	1
Manipur	12	-16	-2	7	-8	-4
Sikkim	12	-18	-21	-10	-16	-4
Mizoram	15	18	-22	-7	-21	-13
Delhi	16	0	-19	-	-	-
T.N.	16	-22	-15	-18	-6	-5
Maharashtra	19	-14	-14	-25	-17	-9
Punjab	21	-10	-20	-16	-12	-3
Himachal	22	-19	-22	-26	-18	-8
W.B.	24	-20	-11	-15	-8	-2
Karnataka	25	-8	-20	-39	-17	-5
Tripura	29	-17	-5	-14	-10	4
Gujarat	30	-12	-20	-23	-23	-14
Haryana	30	-14	-24	-11	-15	-7
A.P.	32	-11	-20	-33	-22	-13
Bihar	35	-15	-21	-20	-15	-5
Rajasthan	38	-22	-25	-28	-31	-14
Meghalaya	39	4	-19	-4	-17	-16
Odisha	41	-27	-28	-35	-22	-10
U.P.	41	-18	-26	-23	-21	-11
Arunachal	42	-15	10	-32	-15	-10
Assam	44	-12	-20	-42	-27	-25
M.P.	47	-24	-23	-42	-27	-19
India	33	-18	-20	-32	-22	-14

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Do you Know?

Some of the targets to be achieved under SDG 3:

- By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per100,000 live birth
- By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years ofage, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as lowas 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per1,000 live births
- By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicablediseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health andwell-being
- Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection,access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective,quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

Terminology

- Infant mortality rate (IMR) is the number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under one year of age.
- Neonatal mortality rate: is the number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under 28 days of life.
- Under-Five Mortality (U5MR) or child mortality is the number of deaths per1,000 live births of children under five year of age.
- Maternal mortality rate: The number of registered maternal deaths due to birth- or pregnancy-related complications per 100,000 registered live births.
- According to the just released SRS (Sample Registration System) bulletin, IMR of India has declined, from 37 per 1000 live births in 2015 to 33 per 1000 live births in 2017.

Reasons for high mortality rates: Which accounted for 62% of all child deaths

- Pneumonia
- Prematurity, low birth weight
- Diarrhoeal diseases
- Neonatal infections
- Birth asphyxia & birth trauma

Universal access to public healthcare

- **Introduction:**
  Government's flagship health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat, officially called the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), has been widely lauded since it was launched last year.
- Various states are in the process of rolling it out.
- It aims to pick up the illness bills of 500 million of the country's most vulnerable. The sorry picture presented by Bihar in dealing with a deadly encephalitis outbreak among children of poverty-stricken families, attention has been drawn back to the ramshackle state of public healthcare facilities. These remain abysmal in most parts of the country.

Issues:

- Severe shortage of medical personnel, including doctors and nurses, as well as a dearth of hospitals and hospital beds. This shortage is especially stark in rural areas.

- In many places, primary health centres, community health centres, and sub-centres are located too far from people's homes. Even in the big cities, patients often have to run from one hospital to another in search of a particular facility or a bed.
- Private facilities are the preferred option for most, if only because of treatment is assured. The poor, however, typically find themselves shut out not just by steep prices—which Ayushman Bharat expects to overcome—but also invisible class barriers.

Way ahead: Free or nominally priced public services as a right

- Making public health services so easily accessible and of such reliable quality that only the well-off opt for the extra comfort of private sector facilities. Achieving this would be a long haul, no doubt, but several middle-income countries have done it. The government needs to upgrade healthcare infrastructure in the country at two levels.
- Ensruing that the quality of public healthcare services can be trusted by everyone, regardless of socio-economic status. Quality signals are best sent out by celebrities and public representatives using these facilities themselves.
- The authorities must ensure that enough healthcare centres or hospitals are operational across the country within reasonable reach of residential areas— urban and rural. Along with the number of hospitals, the number of beds also needs to rise sharply.

The financial pooling of illness risks is all very well, but the wherewithal to deal with illness itself must come first.

Conclusion:

By budget figures of the last fiscal year, India spends just a shade over 1% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on healthcare. This includes central expenditure on the Ayushman Bharat scheme. The Interim Budget for this year upped the percentage, but only slightly. The government set a goal last year of 2.5% of GDP by 2025. For progress to be made towards that objective, however, this year's budget need to pencil in a significant hike in the country's health outlay.

Healthcare needs to be fixed in mission mode. Every child's life claimed by a treatable disease is one life too many.

Connecting the dots:

- Healthcare needs to be fixed in mission mode. Ensuring universal access to public healthcare and upping the health budget is needed.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

NREGA 3.0: Part I

Background:

In the run up to the elections, a plethora of redistributive programmes, including farm loan waivers, cash transfers and minimum income guarantees came to the forefront as campaigners sought to suggest solutions for rural distress.

Amongst these is a proposal to launch a revised NREGA 3.0, in which 150 days of employment would be guaranteed to the rural poor.

Almost 15 years after it was enacted, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) its time we analyse its impact on the poor.

What does the NREGA intend to do?

Enacted as a legal right, the NREGA's primary goal is social protection for the most vulnerable. India has had relative success with workfare, with the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme being the most important precursor to the NREGA.

- The primary advantage of workfare programmes over farm loan waivers, cash transfers and minimum income programmes is that the poor self-select themselves into the programme, thus reducing the identification costs.
- The ability of a programme to parsimoniously target the ultra-poor without elaborate means testing is critical for its long-term success, particularly when fiscal resources are scarce. Crucially, the most basic tenet of the NREGA — its self-targeting mechanism — does work. Poorer and disadvantaged households are more likely to seek NREGA work.

Issue of demand-supply gap:

In practice, however, not all those who demand NREGA work receive it. In 2009/10, almost half the households in rural India wanted NREGA jobs but only a quarter received them, according to estimates by Liu and Barrett (2016). More recently, employment provided under NREGA in 3,500 panchayats in 2017/18 was a third less than that demanded.

Impact of NREGA on poverty:

Three available national counterfactual-based studies show modest increases in household per capita expenditures and consumption in the first few years of the programme, the picture is entirely different for marginalised groups, who have benefited greatly due to NREGA.

- A study shows Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe recipients increased their real monthly per capita expenditure by 37 per cent in the lean season of 2008, cutting poverty by almost half.
- Likewise, state-level studies show NREGA favours the most disadvantaged. The poorest SC/ST households and those with a disabled member saw higher growth in consumption and nutritional intake in the short-run, and in the medium-term, substantially increased their non-financial assets.

  In Bihar, a study estimates that NREGA reduced poverty by roughly 1 percentage point in 2009.

Reducing vulnerability:

Aside from its impact on the poorest, NREGA also plays a critical role in reducing vulnerability. Research indicates that NREGA provides employment after an adverse rainfall shock, enables workers to smoothen their consumption with variations in rainfall, and reduces risk during the lean season.

Conclusion:

- Despite been severely rationed, NREGA acts, as per its mandate, as a very desirable social protection mechanism amongst the most disadvantaged classes.
- Compared to other proposals on the table, NREGA efficiently allows the most disadvantaged to spur their consumption in times of rural distress.
- As a new administration weighs policy options at a time of rural unemployment and weakening consumption, pre-monsoon, it would be prudent to substantially ramp up NREGA so all those who demand jobs, receive them.

Connecting the dots:

- NREGA provides a vital safety net and the dignity of rightful employment to those who are most vulnerable.

Better implementation of the Right to Education Act

Background:

In India, the right to education was made a fundamental right by inserting Article 21A by the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002. It was enabled with the subsequent enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

However, its implementation has been a challenge for most States as they have discretion in how the Act gets implemented.

No child left behind:

- The RTE Act bears many similarities to the U.S.'s No Child Left Behind Act, including school accountability, assessment standards and teacher training. Like the U.S., in India too States have been given major leeway in deciding the course of implementation.
- Section 12 (1) (c) of the Act mandates all private schools (except for minority schools) to allocate 25% of their seats to economically weaker sections, i.e. those families with an income of less than Rs. 2 lakh a year, and other disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the physically challenged.
  The State government will then reimburse these schools for students admitted under this provision, at an amount per month that is determined by the State rules.

Issues to be addressed:

- A problem that recurs every year is mandated access to underprivileged sections of society. The process for admission under Section 12 (1) (c) is far from perfect. This is evident in the large number of vacancies in several cities in the country. For instance, on the last day of admissions under the RTE Act, under the first lottery there were 20,835 vacancies in Maharashtra.
- Despite the use of GIS tagging, several parents complain that the system is faulty in identifying nearby schools.
- Financial problems continue to mar the system — many schools collect money for textbooks and uniform though this is part of the State-stipulated fees.
  This is a chain reaction: the Centre is supposed to release up to 70% of the funds for this programme which is often delayed.
- While moving the system online has led to transparency, in many States the management committee as per the RTE Act has not been notified.
- RTE rules also state that unfilled seats can be filled again in September but governments have no conspicuous public announcements regarding this.
- There have also been several grievances regarding the '1 km radius' criterion, especially for rural residents who may not have any private schools in their vicinity.

Leading by the example:

Tamil Nadu, which has always been at the forefront of educational progress in India, has made certain strides in the implementation of Section 12 (1) (c).

- It has widened the ambit of "disadvantaged sections" to include HIV positive children and transgenders.
- A centralised database has been created by the State where people can access all the matriculation (State board) schools in the State which lie within 1 km of their residence.
- Another notification has been issued to bring all schools affiliated to boards other than State boards under the control of its Director of School Education for RTE implementation.

Going forward:

- The procedure for admission should be made through a single-point window online for all school boards, with computer kiosks to assist parents who may not be able to fill the form online.
  A mobile application should be built with live information on the number of seats available in each school under the 25% quota.
- An RTE compliance audit should be conducted for all schools every year by the State Education Department. Any aid given to private schools must be tied to the levels of compliance achieved by the school.
- Several schools do not adhere to the 25% quota. These schools should be penalised and derecognised if continuous violations occur.
- Every school should declare prominently that it is RTE compliant — and the admission procedure, including deadlines, should be displayed at the school premises.
- On the government side of things, funds need to be released in a timely manner, so that it inspires confidence in schools to fill all the vacancies.

Conclusion:

Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act recognises the need for inclusion, and explicitly establishes responsibility on all stakeholders to contribute towards this goal.

Its only after all the stakeholders involved work in cooperation and in true spirit that the RTE Act will serve its purpose.

Connecting the dots:

- Complications related to various provisions of the RTE Act need to be addressed in order to ensure that education in India become inclusive. Elucidate.

The draft National Education Policy, 2019

In news:

The draft National Education Policy, 2019 is out in the public domain, with comments sought from all stakeholders. Drawing inputs from the T.S.R. Subramanian Committee report and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the **K. Kasturirangan Committee** has produced a document that is comprehensive, far-sighted and grounded in realities.

Unique features of the policy:

The draft policy seeks to revamp all aspects of the sector and suggests brave new ideas. The idea that lifelong education is based on four pillars — *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be* — has inspired the committee to cover every aspect of the education sector: school, higher, vocational and adult education.

It also includes the whole gamut of professional education — engineering, medicine, agriculture, law, etc.

Early childhood education:

- In school education, the idea is to cover children of 3-18 years [instead of the present 6-14 years under the Right to Education (RTE) Act], three years under early childhood care and education (ECCE) and four years under secondary education.
- Restructuring the 10+2 education structure into a 5+3+3+4 structure so that the five years from ages three to seven or till the end of Std 2 are seen as one "foundational stage".
- The next two stages, of three years each, are "preparatory" and "upper primary", first ensure the acquisition of foundational skills and then their development. These stages are not only consistent with the development of children, but they are also useful to meet the overall goal of ensuring basic learning outcomes stage-by-stage.

Higher education:

- The aim is to double the Gross Enrolment Ratio from 25% to 50% by 2035 and make universities the hubs of research.
  - Tier I universities/institutions devoted primarily to research and some teaching.
  - Tier 2 universities devoted to teaching and some research,.
  - Tier 3 institutions comprising mainly colleges that are to be converted gradually into degree-giving autonomous institutions.
- Achieve 'universal foundational literacy and numeracy' through initiatives like the National Tutors Programme and the Remedial Instructional Aides Programme.

- Introduction of school complexes, a system of modular Board Examinations to allow flexibility, setting up Special Education Zones in disadvantaged regions, recognising teachers at the heart of the system, moving teacher education into the university system, and stressing the importance of learning new languages are among the key recommendations.
- The policy recommends community and volunteer participation in collaboration with schools to overcome the current crisis. Schools generally work in isolation from the community they serve.
- The policy recognises the crucial importance of **liberal arts** (it recommends setting up five Indian Institutes of Liberal Arts offering four-year courses) and the study of modern and classical languages (it recommends setting up National Institutions for Pali, Prakrit and Persian).
- It proposes separate institutions for regulation, funding, standard setting and accreditation, a National Research Foundation, and a Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog/ National Education Commission.
- Vocational education, meant for 50% of the students, is sought to be integrated with school and higher education.

Challenges in implementation:

- Doubling of public funding to 6% of the GDP and increasing overall public expenditure on education to 20% from the current 10%.
  This is desirable but does not appear to be feasible in the near future given that most of the additional funding has to come from the States.
  Though innovative financing schemes have been proposed, involving the private sector, how those schemes will shape up remains to be seen.
- Expanding coverage under the RTE Act is extremely important, but should be introduced gradually, keeping in mind the quality of infrastructure and teacher vacancies.
- The idea of regulation being brought under the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority, standard setting under the General Education Council and funding under the Higher Education Grants Council may require a revisit so that there is synchronisation with the current Bill for the Higher Education Commission of India.
- Language issues have to be handled sensitively in view of their emotional overtones, as witnessed recently.

Conclusion:

The “learning crisis” is very deep. The education system — public and private — has been deteriorating rapidly and has affected the quality of our human resources.

If this trend is not reversed, the dysfunctional system will become more and more expensive but will not deliver the goods. It will require a huge commitment and conviction to make it happen.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss unique features of the draft National Education Policy, 2019. Also comment on the challenges in implementation of suggested recommendations.

In the absence of good law

Background

What is public procurement?

Public procurement refers to the purchase by governments and state-owned enterprises of goods, services and works. As public procurement accounts for a substantial portion of the taxpayers' money, governments are expected to carry it out efficiently and with high standards of conduct in order to ensure high quality of service delivery and safeguard the public interest.

Policies of the government

A. Establishment of GeM:

Government e Marketplace (GeM) is an online procurement platform for government ministries and departments, and the most widely used channel for public procurement in India. MSMEs, DPIIT recognised startups and other private companies can register on GeM as sellers and sell their products and services directly to government entities.

B. Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSME) order 2012:

The Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSME) order 2012 has mandated Every Central Ministry/Department/PSU shall set an annual goal for procurement from the MSE sector at the beginning of the year, with the objective of achieving an overall procurement goal of minimum 25 per cent of the total annual purchases from the products or services produced or rendered by MSEs.

C. Government has issued Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India), Order 2017

Under this purchase preference shall be given to local suppliers in all procurements undertaken by procuring entities in the manner specified. As per the order the minimum local content shall

ordinarily be 50%. The Nodal Ministry may prescribe a higher or lower percentage in respect of any particular item and may also prescribe the manner of calculation of local content. The margin of purchase preference shall be 20% .

Lacunas in the Present system and steps needed

- Procurement by the government accounts for 30% of the GDP; yet there is no comprehensive parliamentary legislation till date to regulate such public procurement by the Central government.
- Charges of corruption are common and instead of legislation, there is a maze of regulations, guidelines and rules.
- Existing constitutional provisions are themselves no great help in this area. While Article 282 provides for financial autonomy in public spending, there are no further provisions that address any guidance on public procurement principles, policies, procedures or for grievance redress.
- State public procurement is regulated by a State Act only in five States: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. The grievance redress mechanisms provided in these Acts are not confidence-inspiring as they are neither independent nor effective.
- Frequent Litigations: Courts have imposed stringent self-imposed restrictions in the area of judicial review vis-à-vis tenders that the power to interfere is very sparingly exercised, if at all.
- The procuring officer is empowered by judicial principles such as “Government must be allowed a play in the joints”. Hence the legal framework is feeble.
- In such a depressing legal scenario, it is no surprise that public procurement tender awards are often challenged in constitutional courts.
- Hence need of the hour is to provide efficacious remedy to redress grievances.

Need of Legislation

Parliamentary legislation to regulate public procurements which provide adequate means for aggrieved parties to challenge inequities and illegalities in public procurement needs to be put in place.

The United Progressive Alliance had introduced the Public Procurement Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2012, “to regulate public procurement with the objective of ensuring transparency accountability and probity in the procurement process”.

The National Democratic Alliance, in 2015, revamped the provisions of the earlier Bill to come up with the Public Procurement Bill, 2015; but it is pending.

Conclusion

- Public procurement is a crucial pillar of services delivery for governments. Because of the sheer volume of spending it represents, well governed public procurement can and must play a major role in fostering public sector efficiency and establishing citizens' trust.
- Well-designed public procurement systems also contribute to achieving pressing policy goals such as environmental protection, innovation, job creation and the development of small and medium enterprises.

Connecting the dots:

- Public procurement is a crucial pillar of services delivery for governments. Do you think there is need of a well designed public procurement policy? Elaborate.

Centre set to roll out 'Jal Shakti' scheme for water-starved areas

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II

In news

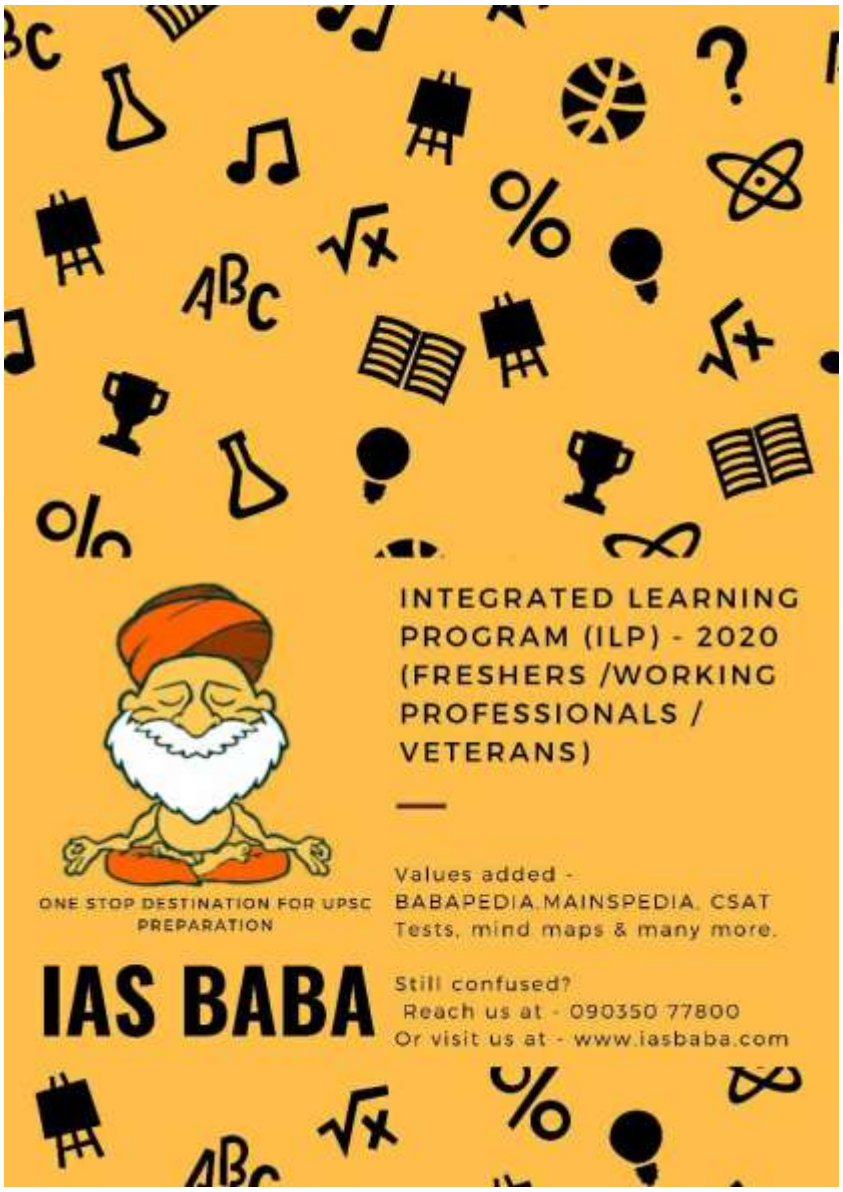
- The Centre is set to initiate the Jal Shakti Abhiyan to ramp up rainwater harvesting and conservation efforts in 255 water-stressed districts from July 1, 2019.
- Though water is a State issue, the campaign will be coordinated by 255 central IAS officers of Joint or Additional Secretary-rank, drawn from ministries as varied as Space, Petroleum and Defence, etc.

About 'Jal Shakti' campaign

- The campaign seems to follow the model of last year's Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, where central officials monitored the implementation of seven flagship development schemes in 117 aspirational districts across the country.
- The campaign will run from July 1 to September 15 in States receiving rainfall during the south-west monsoon, while States receiving rainfall in the retreating or north-east monsoon will be covered from October 1 to November 30.
- The Jal Shakti Abhiyan would aim to accelerate water harvesting, conservation and borewell recharge activities already being carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and the Integrated Watershed Management Programme of the Rural Development Ministry, along with existing water

body restoration and afforestation schemes being undertaken by the Jal Shakti and Environment Ministries.

- Progress would be monitored in real time through mobile applications and an online dashboard at indiawater.gov.in
- A major communications campaign on TV, radio, print, local and social media will be carried out, with celebrities mobilised to generate awareness for the campaign.



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INTERNATIONAL

Quad one way to fix regional issues: Australian envoy

Part of Prelims: International relations, Mains: GS Paper II – International relations.

In news

- Quad, ASEAN and RCEP are common interest areas of India and Australia.
- There is need for flexibility, agility and speed in solving regional problems and the Quad is one of many such small groupings in solving them.
- A successful conclusion to negotiations on RCEP would help shape the regional rules and norms governing trade, investment and the broader economy.

About Quad:

It is considered as an informal grouping among India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. It has been seen as a prospective coalition among the four countries with a political and security perspective in the Indo- Pacific region. The group is currently only a proposal, and has not taken form of an official alliance/organization or any other designated international group.

About RCEP

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a proposed arrangement between ASEAN and six Asia-Pacific countries including India and Australia. Mainly with the focus on trade and investment.

India to actively curb 'conflict' diamonds

Part of Prelims and mains GS II: International peace and security

In news

- India has committed to play an active role to curb the circulation of 'conflict diamonds' or 'blood diamonds' in the international market by further strengthening the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS).
- The 4Cs [cut, clarity, colour and carat] of diamond may soon be expanded to 5Cs with the fifth C being 'conflict-free'. And the 5Ps of diamond marketing [precious, popular, prestige, priceless] will include 'peace' diamonds.
- KPCS Intersessional Meeting is an annual mid-year event of KPCS, which unites administrations, civil societies and diamond industry to reduce the flow of conflict

diamonds used to finance wars against governments around the world, mostly in African countries. India is the KP chair for 2019.

- The 'blood' or 'conflict' diamonds had been almost excluded from global trade and now account for only 2%. Every rough diamond is accompanied by a certificate confirming its non-conflict origin, and export-import procedures in most of the countries are now subject to rigorous control.

Do you know?

- **The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)** is the process established in 2003 to prevent "conflict diamonds" from entering the mainstream rough diamond market by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/56 following recommendations in the Fowler Report.

Global Peace Index 2019

Part of Prelims: International relations, Mains: GS Paper II – International relations

In news

- Global Peace Index 2019 is Published by Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)
- This is the 13th edition of Global Peace Index which ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their levels of peacefulness.
- It ranks countries and regions on three broad based themes:
  1. Extent of conflict
  2. Safety and Security
  3. Level of militarisation

According to the report,

- For the world as a whole, 2019 was the first time the peace score has improved in the last five years.
- West Asia and North Africa is the least peaceful region of the world followed by South Asia. Europe is the most peaceful region of the world.
- Afghanistan was the least peaceful country of the world in 2019. Earlier it was Syria. While Iceland remains the most peaceful country in the world.

India:

- India's rank: 141 (Down 5 ranks from 2018)

- India's ranking and scores have deteriorated largely due to internal conflicts, the country's relation with Pakistan and border tensions with China.
- In 2018, the report noted India's score was high on the 'Political Terror Scale'.

U.S. wants fair and reciprocal trade with India, says State Department

Part of Prelims and mains GS II International Relations

In news

- The State Department reacted to India's announcement of retaliatory tariffs on certain U.S. imports, reiterating U.S. President Donald Trump's message of reciprocal trade and the strength of U.S.-India ties.
- India is one of the US's closest strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S.-India partnership stands upon a shared commitment to democratic values and the rule of law.

Challenges in the Indo-U.S. relationship

- U.S.'s preferential trade access system
- The Generalized System of Preferences (India was recently taken off the beneficiary list as of June 5)
- 5G network infrastructure, and data localisation

Regarding 5G, the U.S. is trying to dissuade countries from letting Chinese telecom giant Huawei participate in building their next-generation networks citing security concerns.
The U.S. is also concerned about the direction in which India's policies with respect to data portability across borders is going and that has become one of the areas of disagreement in trade discussions.

FATF warns Pak., but keeps it off the blacklist

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS II International Relations

In news

- Pakistan has avoided being placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist during the multilateral financial watchdog's plenary meetings in Orlando, Florida held from June 16 to 21.

- The FATF expresses concern that not only did Pakistan fail to complete its action plan items with January deadlines, it also failed to complete its action plan items due May 2019.
- The FATF strongly urges Pakistan to swiftly complete its action plan by October 2019 when the last set of action plans are set to expire. Otherwise, the FATF will decide the next step at that time for insufficient progress.
- The mention of transnational terrorist financing is significant in light of India's efforts to isolate Pakistan on the international stage in the context of its support for terror in Kashmir.

Background

In June 2018, Pakistan was placed on a FATF greylist of countries whose laws do not adequately deal with money laundering and terrorist financing and agreed to a 10-point action plan to strengthen its anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism and proliferation regime.

Blacklist, greylist criteria

- To stay off of the FATF blacklist, the support of at least three of a total of 36 (excluding two regional organisations) FATF members is required.
- Fifteen members need to support a country's move off of the greylist, as per the FATF charter.
- Currently Iran and North Korea are in the Blacklist.

Developing a shared vision for SDGs in South Asia

Background:

South Asia covers only about 3.5% of the world's land surface area but hosts a fourth of its population, making it a region of significant importance for international development. In spite of the geographic proximity countries in this region enjoy and their common socio-cultural bonds, this is one of the world's least integrated regions. Intra-regional trade is a meagre 5% of the total trade these countries do globally, while intra-regional investment is less than 1% of the region's overall global investment.

South Asia's average GDP per capita is only about 9.64% of the global average. Accounting for more than 30% of the world's poor, the region faces myriad economic and environmental challenges.

Lack of initiatives:

While the countries share a host of common development challenges, economic cooperation remains less than adequate.

While, A few noteworthy regional initiatives such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative have been undertaken to bring the countries closer together, economically and socially, there is scope for much more.

For a region with common development challenges of inequality, poverty, weak governance and poor infrastructure, a shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C).

Need of shared vision:

- The 17 goals and their 169 targets under SDGs are inter-connected and cannot be implemented by countries working in isolation. Many are transnational in nature and require regional efforts.
  South Asian countries could benefit a lot by adopting a regional framework of cooperation that can support, strengthen and stimulate the SDGs.
  In the SDG Index 2018, which is an assessment of countries' progress, among 156 countries only two South Asian countries, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, are in the top 100. India is ranked 112th.
- **Varying performances & Similarities:**
  A closer look at the country-level data shows that India is performing well in Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) while doing poorly in goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).

There are a lot of similarities among these three big economies(India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) of South Asia with respect to achieving some specific SDGs as well as exhibiting poor performance in some common goals.

Challenges:

- Most South Asian countries have made good progress in ending extreme poverty, but they face persistent challenges to goals related to industry, innovation and

infrastructure, zero hunger, gender equality, education, sustainable cities and communities and decent work and economic growth.

- These apart, most of South Asia continues to be vulnerable to climate change and climate-induced natural disasters.

Way ahead:

A regional strategic approach to tackle common development challenges can bring enormous benefits to South Asia.

- SDGs related to energy, biodiversity, infrastructure, climate resilience and capacity development are transnational, and here policy harmonisation can play a pivotal role in reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.
- Bangladesh has undertaken exemplary initiatives for analysing its available resources and additional funding requirements for SDG implementation, suggesting that the country requires an additional $928 billion to fully implement the SDGs. The study identifies five possible sources for SDGs financing: public sector, private sector, public-private partnership, external sector and non-government organisations.
- Similarly, India has formulated some pragmatic plans and initiatives to improve food and nutrition security from which many of the neighbouring countries can benefit.

To address institutional and infrastructural deficits, South Asian countries need deeper regional cooperation. On financing the SDGs in South Asia, countries can work towards increasing the flow of intra-regional FDI. The private sector too can play a vital role in resource mobilisation.

Conclusion:

If the countries of South Asia, the fastest growing region of the world, can come to a common understanding on regional integration and cooperation in achieving the SDGs, it can unleash a powerful synergistic force that can finally make South Asia converge.
A convergence towards achieving a common socio-economic agenda gives hope that no one in South Asia will be left behind in the journey towards eradicating poverty and enduring dignity to all.

Connecting the dots:

- For the South Asia region, which has common development challenges of inequality, poverty, weak governance and poor infrastructure, a shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C). Comment.

Pompeo to pave way for Modi-Trump meet

Part of Prelims and mains GS II International Relations

In news

- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit from June 25 to 27 will give a boost to the engagement between the political leaderships of India and the U.S.
- The bilateral trade between India and US had grown over the years to about $150 billion.

Major concerns to be discussed during meetings and on the sideline of G20 summit

- Difficult issues on trade such as Generalised system of preferences, etc.
- 5G telecommunications; U.S. concerns about Chinese company Huawei's participation in the 5G roll-out in India on the economic and security aspects.
- India's planned purchase of the Russian S-400 anti-missile systems and US offer of high-technology hardware such as the F-35 combat aircraft.
- U.S. concerns on data localisation and a possible quid pro quo with H-1B visas for IT professionals.
- The Iran sanctions and India's concerns on energy security

'Iran made a very big mistake by shooting down U.S. drone'- Trump

Part of Prelims and mains GS II International relations and Current events of national and international importance

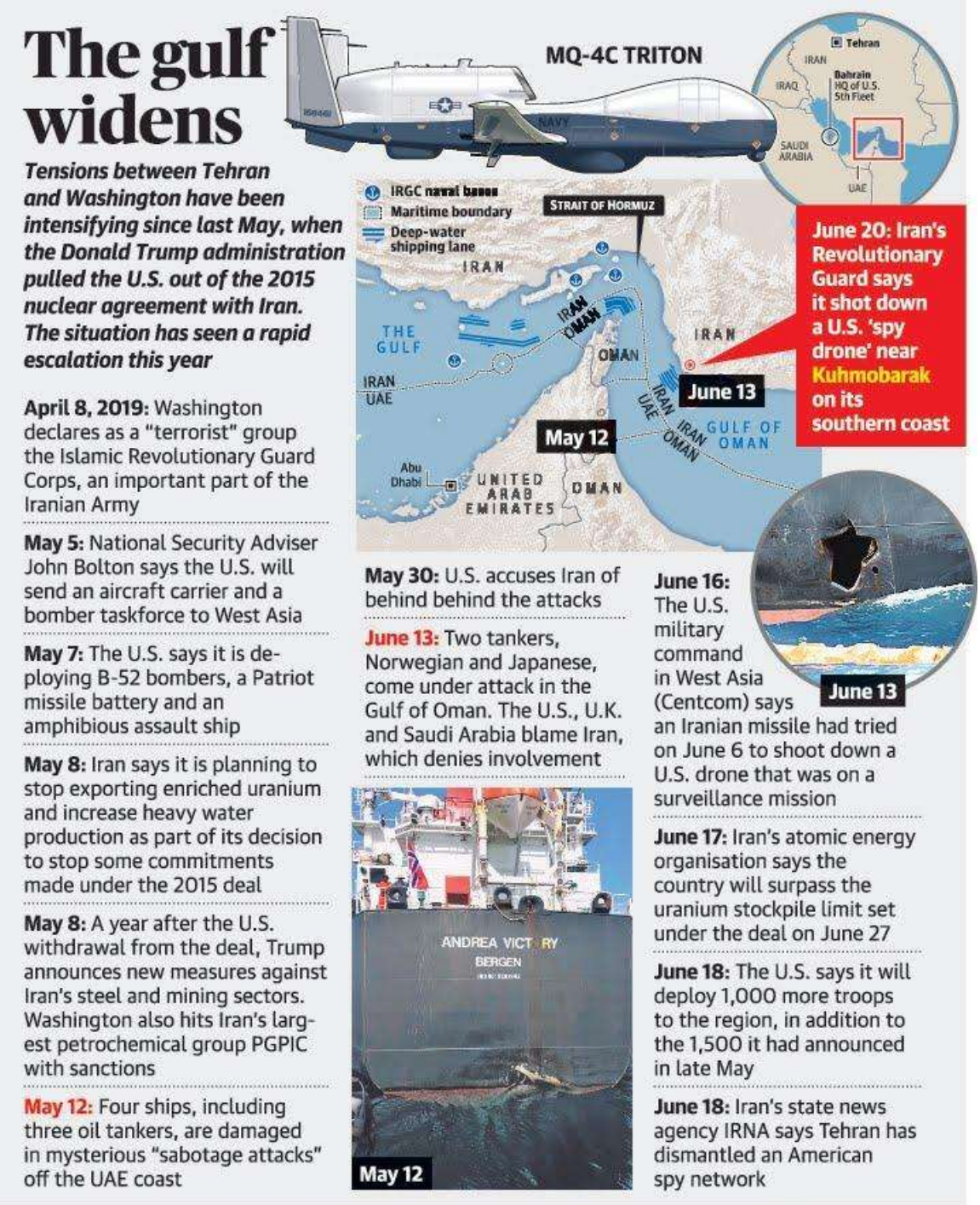
In news

Iranian state media said the "spy" drone was brought down over the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan whereas according to a U.S. official the drone had been downed in international air space over the Strait of Hormuz.

Rising tensions in the Gulf

https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareImage?Pictureid=GCP61OKL5.1

Do you know?



- Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran and Oman.
- About a third of the world's seaborne oil exits the Gulf via Strait of Hormuz.

Weathering the incoming geopolitical storm

Introduction:

The nature and dynamics of Southern Asian geopolitics are undergoing a radical transformation, slowly, steadily and in an irrevocable manner.

Is New Delhi adequately prepared to weather the incoming geopolitical storm?

Growing uncertainty in Southern Asian geopolitics:

- There is a sharp power competition in the region.
  The U.S. is caught between its reluctance to part with its fading glory on the one hand and unwillingness to do what it takes to maintain its regional influence on the other.
  When challenged by China and Russia in the regional geopolitical landscape, the U.S.'s superpower instinct is to push back, often leading to short-sighted decisions and confused policies. Russia and China are jointly and individually challenging the U.S.'s pre-eminence and drafting smaller countries of the region into their bandwagon/s. The resultant geopolitical competition for space, power and influence in the regional scheme of things is undoing the traditional geopolitical certainties in Southern Asia.
- **The China pivot:**
  While, Washington's role as the regional pivot and power manager is becoming a thing of the past with Beijing increasingly able and willing to assume that role. Regional geopolitics, from Iran to Central Asia and from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean region, is increasingly being shaped by China. China is the new regional hegemon with states in the region jumping on its bandwagon without much resistance. When new powers are on an ascendance, its neighbours tend to recalibrate their policies and old partnerships and alliances. Regional holdouts and challengers such as India will need to balance themselves tactfully to steer clear of the rising hegemon's ire.
- The presence of an **extreme trust deficit** among the various actors in the region.
  India and Pakistan, or China and India do not trust each other. Aa trust deficit exists between even seemingly congenial partners such as the U.S. and India, Russia and China, and among traditional partners such as Iran and India, and Russia and India. The varying degrees of trust deficit when combined with other factors such as unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings or the occurrence of a crisis could easily push the region towards more conflict and friction, and obviously less cooperation and regional integration.
- The **rising war talk in the region**:
  The possibility of a military conflict between Iran and the U.S., which in turn would draw many more countries in the region into it leading to widespread instability, potential for India-Pakistan border skirmishes and possible escalation, an escalating China-U.S. trade

war, and the many proxy and cold wars in Afghanistan and West Asia will keep the temperature high in the region for the foreseeable future.

In sum, a power transition in the Southern Asian sub-system, an extreme trust deficit and the escalating war talk pose ominous signs for the region.

Way ahead:

India needs to adopt a slew of balancing acts in order to weather the incoming geopolitical storm.

- India would need to balance its innate desire to get closer to the U.S. with the unavoidable necessities of not excessively provoking China both in the maritime and continental domains.

  Clearly, getting too close to the U.S. will provoke China, and vice versa.
- **Driving India's West Asia policy:**

  Taking care of its energy and other interests (including the Chabahar project) with Iran and not alienate the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel by doing so.

  While Iran's share in India's energy imports is steadily decreasing, alienating Iran might not suit India's strategic interests in the longer run.
- **Dealing with the Russia-China partnership:**

  It will be crucial for India's continental strategy, be it with regard to arms sales, the Afghan question or checking Chinese dominance of the region.

  New Delhi should be clever enough to exploit the not-so-apparent fissures between Beijing and Moscow. A related concern should be the growing relationship between Pakistan and Russia which must be dealt with by smart diplomacy rather than outrage.
- Srategic partnership between Pakistan and China:

  China, being a rising superpower and an already status quoist power in the region, could potentially be persuaded to check Pakistan's revisionist tendencies. This again requires a great deal of subtle effort from New Delhi to convince Beijing that it has great stakes in regional strategic stability.

  What must be noted is that both Beijing and New Delhi, despite their sharp differences and unavoidable strategic competition, share a stake in the region's stability. Therefore even a small measure of rapprochement between them, as it seemingly exists today, could stabilise the region to a great extent.
- **Handling Afghanistan:**

  If India is serious about having a say in Afghanistan's future, it would need to enact several balancing acts there: between Russia and China, China and Pakistan, the Taliban and Kabul, and the Taliban and Pakistan.

  In a constantly changing Afghan geopolitical landscape, the contents of India's interests should also evolve.

Conclusion:

- A benign unipolarity or a balanced multipolarity with some amount of great power concert is generally better than unbalanced multipolarity.
- Unbalanced multipolarity when combined with a situation of power transition in the regional sub-system, as is perhaps the case today, might prove to be destabilising.
- New Delhi should be careful to avoid getting caught in a nutcracker geopolitical situation in the region. Engaging in a delicate balancing game is undeniably the need of the hour. India needs to see through many balancing acts to deal with regional tensions.

Connecting the dots:

- A power transition in the Southern Asian sub-system, an extreme trust deficit between regional players and the escalating war talk pose threatening signs for the region. In such a scenario, India needs to adopt balancing acts. Discuss.

Data Protection: Importance, Global debate, India's stand

Introduction:

The IT Ministry's Bill on data protection is scheduled to be introduced in Parliament during the current session. Worldwide, the data flow debate is playing out at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and G20.

Why is data valuable?

Data is any collection of information that is stored in a way so computers can easily read it. These days, most people refer to data to mean information about their messages, social media posts, online transactions, and browser searches.

Big data refers to the immense amount of data that can now be collected, stored, and analysed to find patterns.

- This large collection of information about people's online habits has become an important source of profits. Your online activity can expose a lot about who you are, and companies find it valuable to use the information to target advertisements to you.
- Governments and political parties have also gained interest in these data sets for elections and policymaking.

What exactly about data laws are countries debating

Data is stored in a physical space. Data is also transported across country borders physically, traveling through underwater cables. These aspects of data flows — where it is stored, where it is sent, where it is turned into something useful — determines who has access to the data, who profits off the data, who taxes the data, and who "owns" the data.

With these questions in mind, individual governments are developing their own domestic rules and negotiating with each other on a global stage, raising values of national security, economic growth, and privacy.

Where does India's domestic policy on data stand?

India's recent drafts and statements have strong signals for data localisation, which means that data of Indians (even if collected by an American company) must be stored and processed in India.

Along with a Reserve Bank of India directive to payment companies to localise financial data, the Ministry of Commerce's draft e-commerce policy is currently in public consultation.

The IT Ministry has drafted a data protection law that will be introduced in Parliament and has also framed draft intermediary rules.

China has developed similar laws, which proponents say allow for a flourishing domestic economy of data centres and data processing by blocking foreign players out. This is why Indian companies, like Reliance and PayTM, usually support data localisation.

Arguments for localisation:

- Localisation will help law enforcement access the data. Currently, India has to use "mutual legal assistance treaties" (MLAT) with the US to get the data of Indians that are controlled by American companies. By requiring a copy of the data to be stored in India (data mirroring), the government hopes to have more direct control over these companies, including the option to levy more taxes on them.
- The government also argues for data localisation on the ground of national security, to prevent foreign surveillance and attacks.

Counter-arguments against data localisation:

- The US government and companies want cross-border flow of data. It would allow companies to store the data of Indians in the most efficient place in the world. Proponents of free flow of data worry that if all countries begin to protect their data, it may backfire on India's own companies that seek global growth.
- Another caution is that these laws could bring increased state surveillance, like India's draft intermediary rules that would require WhatsApp to change its design to proactively filter messages. The company says messages are currently encrypted, meaning neither the company nor any government can see them.

What is happening at the global forums?

Trade tensions worldwide are escalating, giving the data flow debate new relevance at the WTO and G20.

WTO member countries are negotiating rules about e-commerce, which is the buying and selling of goods and services online. Digital trade contributes more to global GDP than physical trade. India is one of the fastest growing markets, with e-commerce expecting to reach $1.2 trillion by 2021.

These laws raise questions about where companies can store, process, and transport data about transactions.

- In their proposals, the US and the EU have called to prohibit customs duties on online transactions while China and Pakistan have called for allowing them.
- The US has also recommended not having overly burdensome data standards nor localisation requirements, while the EU wants data localisation requirements.
- From the G20 meeting in Tsukuba, the Ministerial Statement on Trade and Digital Economy favored cross-border flow of data.

India's stand:

India submitted a November 2017 document opposing any WTO e-commerce negotiations. The digital divide within and across nations is a serious impediment for developing countries to benefit from Digital Trade. Capacity constraints in developing countries, can be overcome, with timely support of training, and creation of digital infrastructure. This is important, for facilitating a level playing field, in the digital economy, for all countries to take equitable advantage of data free flows.

Developing countries **need time and policy space** to build deepest understanding of the subject and formulate their own legal and regulatory framework before meaningfully engaging in e-commerce negotiations.

Connecting the dots:

- A global debate on data protection is ongoing. Why is data valuable? Discuss arguments and counter-arguments for data localisation. Also discuss India's stand on the same.

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54 nations back India for UNSC non-permanent seat

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In news

- India has won the unanimous support of all countries in the 55-member Asia-Pacific Group at the United Nations in support of its bid for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) for a two-year term in 2021-22.
- The development is particularly significant given that Pakistan and China, both countries with which India has had diplomatic challenges at the UN, supported the move.
- India will need the vote of two-thirds of the 193 UN General Assembly members to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC.
- India has been keen to hold the seat in 2021-22 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Independence in 2022.
- It will be hosting the G-20 meeting in New Delhi in 2022.

India and U.S. resolve to work through their trade differences

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In news

- India and the U.S. resolved to "work through" their differences.
- Issues discussed were including tariffs and counter-tariffs imposed by both the countries on each other in the past year, as well as the U.S.'s specific concerns with India's proposed laws on e-commerce and data localisation, on price caps and market access.
- Both sides had come away with a "better understanding" of each other's concerns on a wide variety of issues besides trade, including energy, defence, investment concerns and people-to-people contacts, as well as the growing conflict in the Gulf with Iran and the peace process in Afghanistan.
- India will take its decision on the purchase of the Russian S-400 Triumf anti-missile system in its own "national interest".
- India's concerns over growing U.S.-Iran tensions and their impact on India's energy security were also raised.
- India has zeroed out all oil imports from Iran since the U.S. sanctions deadline ran out on May 2, it has maintained a cordial and close relationship with the Iranian government.

Meetings on the Sidelines of G20

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In news

India-US Meet

- Leaders of both the countries acknowledged the breadth and depth of bilateral ties, including economic, trade, energy, defence and security, counterterrorism and space.
- They reiterated their commitment to provide strong leadership to address global challenges and build prosperity for their citizens in the decades to come.
- **On Iran**

It is in India's fundamental interest to maintain peace and stability in the region.

India's intrests in the region:

- Indian diaspora in the region
- Energy requirements
- Economic interest in the region

India's stand on 5G and data storage

On technological issues such as data storage and 5G network, India ranged itself across the divide from Japan and the U.S., and alongside leaders of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa).

Data storage

The need for framing rules on data within the WTO and not at the G-20, running counter to Japan's initiative as the host of this year's G-20 summit, to push for "Data Free Flow with Trust, (DFFT)". Prime minister Modi refered data as a "new form of wealth".

5G Technology

On the issue of 5G technology, where the U.S. has demanded that countries ban Chinese telecom major Huawei's 5G network because of its ability to spy on them, India had given no assurances to US.

On BRICS informal meeting

Terrorism as the biggest threat to humanity

Describing terrorism as the biggest threat to humanity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the scourge not only kills innocents but also severely affects economic development and social stability.

There is a need to stop all the mediums of support to terrorism and racism.

Three major challenges

- First major challenge; Instability and downfall in the global economy. Unilateralism and competitiveness are overshadowing the rule-based mutilateral global trade systems.
- The second challenge is to make development sustainable and all-inclusive.
- Terrorism is the third major challenge.

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INDIA AND THE WORLD

India and RCEP

Background:

India's participation in the mega-trade agreement, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has long been debated.

If finalised, the RCEP will result in the largest free trade bloc in the world accounting for 25 per cent of global GDP and 30 per cent of world trade.

Issues:

- India's trade deficits with nations have always widened after signing free-trade-agreements (FTAs) with them, citing the cases with ASEAN, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, most of which are RCEP nations.
- It has also been pointed out that India's vulnerable agriculture and dairy sectors, which are not in positions to compete with Australia and New Zealand, will be exposed to vagaries of global trade.
- Indian manufacturing is not competitive enough to face the vagaries of a free trade regime.

  Even after 27 years of liberalisation, inefficiency prevails due to a host of unimplemented reforms in the product and the factor markets.
- On the factor side, labour market reforms are incomplete. Labour productivity in manufacturing is still one of the lowest in the world with spatially fragmented labour laws are escalating the costs of doing business.
- Given this, Indian industry is hardly in a position to compete in the level-playing ground in a free-trade region.

Differences:

- India apprehends that, given its $60-billion trade deficit with China, the RCEP demand to reduce tariffs on 90 per cent of the traded goods to zero will have a disastrous effect on its already struggling MSME sector.

  India is especially apprehensive about Chinese goods swamping its market, forcing domestic producers to cut production or shut down.

- India has expressed its reservations over inclusion of e-commerce in the RCEP talks. The RCEP draft is opposed to data localisation, while India fears the monopoly power of digital giants which includes the likes of Tencent and Alibaba.

ASEAN+3:

- India could be out of the mega trade deal (RCEP).
- China has started pushing for a free trade pact between ASEAN + 3 (which includes the ten-member ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea).
- This would effectively mean that among the 16 countries negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), all except India, Australia and New Zealand would get included in the proposed pact.
- China may be trying to push for an ASEAN + 3 arrangement to speedily create a new order in the region with itself at the helm to counter the challenge posed by the US with which it is engaged in a trade war.

Conclusion:

India's trade diplomacy needs to be reviewed, with both the US and China applying pressure to secure access to its markets. The earlier multilateral consensus has collapsed. India must support exporters through WTO-compatible means in these uncertain times.

Connecting the dots:

- India's participation in the mega-trade agreement, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has long been debated. Discuss the issues around it.

Reviving SAARC

Background:

- The government has shown its commitment to its **strategy of "Neighbourhood First"** by inviting the leaders of neighbouring countries for the second time to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony.
- While in 2014 the invitation went to the leaders of the eight-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), In 2019 it went to leaders of the seven-member Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- BIMSTEC includes five SAARC members (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka), and Myanmar and Thailand, while leaving SAARC members Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Maldives out, due to the geographical location of the Bay of Bengal.

SAARC Importance, Success and Failures:

- SAARC, as an organisation, reflects the South Asian identity of the countries, historically and contemporarily. This is a naturally made geographical identity.
- Equally, there is a cultural, linguistic, religious and culinary affinity that defines South Asia. Therefore, just as rivers, climatic conditions flow naturally from one South Asian country to the other, so do the films, poetry, humour, entertainment and food.
- Since 1985 when the SAARC charter was signed, the organisation has developed common cause in several fields: agriculture, education, health, climate change, science and technology, transport and environment. Each area has seen modest but sustainable growth in cooperation. For example, from 2010, when the South Asian University began in Delhi, the number of applicants for about 170 seats has more than doubled.

SAARC Failures:

SAARC's biggest failure comes from the political sphere, where mainly due to India-Pakistan tensions, heads of state have met only 18 times in 34 years; it has been five years since the last summit in Kathmandu.

BIMSTEC Importance:

- BIMSTEC, on the other hand, is not tied up in the identity of the nations that are members.
- It is essentially a grouping of countries situated around the Bay of Bengal, and began in 1997 (Bhutan and Nepal joined in 2004), a decade after SAARC.
- With India's growing frustration over cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan, it hopes to build more on BIMSTEC's potential.

BIMSTEC is unlikely to supplant SAARC:

- One of BIMSTEC's two founding principles is: "Cooperation within BIMSTEC will constitute an addition to and not be a substitute for bilateral, regional or multilateral cooperation involving the Member States."
- Its official literature describes it as "a bridge between South and South East Asia" and a "platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] members."

What explains the deep resistance to SAARC in India?

- Terrorism emanating from Pakistan is the biggest stumbling block cited by the government.

Mr. Modi cancelled his attendance at the last planned SAARC summit in Islamabad in 2016, after the attack on the Indian Army's brigade headquarters in Uri. Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan followed suit.

This principled stand by India, however, doesn't extend to other organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), into which India and Pakistan were inducted in 2017.

- Another reason is the logjam because of Pakistan's opposition to connectivity projects such as the Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA), energy sharing proposals and others such as the South Asia Satellite offered by India.

Going forward:

- SAARC could adopt the "ASEAN minus X" formula — members who are unwilling to join the consensus can be allowed to join at a future date, while members who wish to go ahead with connectivity, trade or technology cooperation agreements are not impeded.
- In a region increasingly targeted by Chinese investment and loans, SAARC could be a common platform to demand more sustainable alternatives for development, or to oppose trade tariffs together, or to demand better terms for South Asian labour around the world.

Conclusion:

SAARC needs to be allowed to progress naturally and the people of South Asia, who make up a quarter of the world's population, are enabled to fulfil their destiny together.

Connecting the dots:

- SAARC still has the potential to become a platform for South Asian interests and shared growth. Critically analyse.

Foreign Policy Challenges

Background:

The world looks more disorderly in 2019 than was the case five years ago.

- U.S. President Donald Trump's election and the new dose of unpredictability in U.S. policy pronouncements.
- The trade war between the U.S. and China **which is becoming a technology war.**
- **Brexit and the European Union's internal preoccupations.**

- **Erosion of U.S.-Russia arms control agreements and the likelihood of a new arms race covering nuclear, space and cyber domains.**
- **The U.S.'s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.**

Above are some of the developments that add to the complexity of India's principal foreign policy challenge of dealing with the rise of China.

Redefining neighbourhood:

Pakistan:

- Despite good planning there is always the risk of unintended escalation as Balakot (this year) and the downing of an Indian Air Force (IAF) MiG-21 showed.
  In the absence of communication channels between India and Pakistan, it appears that the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates played a role in ensuring the quick release of the IAF pilot, Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan Varthaman, thereby defusing the situation.

Unless the Modi government wants to outsource crisis management to external players, it may be better to have some kind of ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

Other neighbors:

Translating India's natural weight in the region into influence was easier in a pre-globalised world and before China emerged in its assertive avatar.

- It is preferable to work on the basis of generating broad-based consent rather than dominance. This necessitates using multi-pronged diplomatic efforts and being generous as the larger economy.
- It also needs a more confident and coordinated approach in handling neighbourhood organisations — SAARC, BIMSTEC, the Bangladesh, the Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, the Indian Ocean Rim Association.
- Above should be preferably in tandem with bilateralism because our bilateral relations provide us with significant advantages.

Managing China:

China will remain the most important issue, as in 2014. The policy followed was of growing economic, commercial and cultural relations while managing the differences on the boundary dispute through dialogue and confidence-building measures, in the expectation that this would create a more conducive environment for eventual negotiations.
The Doklam stand-off was a rude reminder of that the assumption behind the policy followed for three decades could no longer be sustained.

- The informal summit in Wuhan restored a semblance of calm but does not address the long-term implications of the growing gap between the two countries.
- Meanwhile, there is the growing strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China unfolding on our doorstep. We no longer have the luxury of distance to be non-aligned.

Managing U.S.:

A number of issues have emerged that need urgent attention.

- As part of its policy on tightening sanctions pressure on Iran, the U.S. has terminated the sanctions waiver that had enabled India to import limited quantities of Iranian crude till last month.
- The Generalised System of Preferences scheme has been withdrawn, adversely impacting about 12% of India's exports to the U.S., as a sign of growing impatience with India's inability to address the U.S.'s concerns regarding market access, tariff lines and recent changes in the e-commerce policy.
- The threat of sanctions under the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), were India to proceed with the purchase of the S-400 air and missile defence system from Russia.
- The reconciliation talks between the U.S. and the Taliban as the U.S. negotiates its exit from Afghanistan raise New Delhi's apprehensions about the Taliban's return, constituting another potential irritant.

Way forward:

India lacks the ability to shape events around it on account of resource limitations. These require domestic decisions in terms of expanding the foreign policy establishment though having a seasoned professional at the top does help.

- We need to ensure far more coordination among the different ministries and agencies than has been the case so far.
- Our record in implementation projects is patchy at best and needs urgent attention.
- The focus on the neighbourhood is certainly desirable, for only if we can shape events here can we look beyond. However, the fact that China too is part of the neighbourhood compounds Mr. Modi's foreign policy challenges in his second term.

Employing external balancing to create a conducive regional environment is a new game that will also require building a new consensus at home.

Connecting the dots:

- Recent developments have added to the complexity of India's principal foreign policy challenge of dealing with the rise of China. Discuss strategies to deal with the situation.

Modi, Xi meet in Bishkek, agree to speed up boundary talks

Part of Mains GS II: International Relations

In news

- India and China agreed to expedite the dialogue on the India-China boundary issue for securing a "fair" solution.
- The two leaders met in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, where they will participate in the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- The two leaders discussed the status of the bilateral relationship since the Wuhan summit of April 2018, which came in the backdrop of tension following the 73-day Doklam standoff.
- China highlighted the need for regional cooperation and connectivity and singled out the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor as an example for expanding the India-China ties, which had entered a "new phase" after the Wuhan informal summit.
- The two sides should adhere to the basic judgment that China and India are the opportunities for development and do not pose a threat to each other.
- Russia invited India to take part in the Vladivostok Forum in September

Do you Know?

Vladivostok Forum

Eastern Economic Forum is an international forum held each year in Vladivostok, Russia, for the purpose of encouraging foreign investment in the Russian Far East.

For Wuhan Summit, read: **IASbaba daily current affairs 30 April 2018**

Bishkek lessons

Introduction

The SCO brings together two of the world's great powers — China and Russia — and four central Asian nations — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — with India and Pakistan. Launched by China and Russia nearly two decades ago, the SCO has also been billed by some as the "Alliance of the East" and as a continental counter to the US and more broadly, the maritime West.

India with "Maritime West"(SCO) and "Maritime East"(US)

- India has moved steadily closer to the US in recent years and embraced the Indo-Pacific maritime construct.

- India's navigation between the two competing worlds had become even more difficult as the US ratchets up tensions with both China and Russia.
- But India is very optimistic about Its emerging possibilities in the new dynamic with SCO.

India at SCO

- India continued its stand on opposing the Belt and Road Initiative and turning down China's advice to begin talks with Pakistan.
- With Russia, India sought to expand the strategic partnership to new areas of defence and energy.
- India joined with China and Russia in opposing the new threats to global trade from new American unilateralism under Trump.
- India's bilateral engagement with the SCO summit host Kyrgyzstan underlined the new political commitment to realise the full potential of India's relations with the Central Asian republics.
- Bishkek summit also revealed India's deepening challenges with Afghanistan and Pakistan, while India continues to emphasise an "Afghan-owned and Afghan-led" peace process.
- On a positive note, the forum strongly endorsed India's concerns on cross-border terrorism.

Conclusion

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is constructing a new region, now widely described as Eurasia. In recent years, India tilted more towards US. Therefore the need to manoeuvre between Moscow, Beijing and Washington is now a permanent condition for Indian diplomacy.

Connecting the dots:

- The need to manoeuvre between Moscow, Beijing and Washington is now a permanent condition for Indian diplomacy. Comment

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India and Middle East

Introduction:

- The government in last few years had invested considerable political capital, time and resources in cultivating critical players in the Middle East, namely, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Iran in the Persian Gulf region, and Israel in the Levant.
- It is time to reap the fruits of political investments and elevate the engagements to a higher level.

Challenges and Solutions:

- Iran has been a major foreign policy challenge since the end of the Cold War. The Trump Administration is determined to halt Iran's oil exports completely. The government needs to devise a balanced approach vis-à-vis the United States and its demands on Iran.
  India also needs to enhance its financial commitments to the Chabahar Port project.
- Slash the bureaucratic cobwebs and enable the flow of investments from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which have committed to invest up to US$ 75 and 100 billion, respectively, in India.
- If the Ratnagiri refinery does not take off due to land issues, the government should explore other western coastal states to facilitate Saudi-Emirati investments in the mega refinery project.
- The ongoing intra-Gulf crisis over Qatar does not serve India's interest. Given its economic, political, energy and expatriate links, an early resolution of the Saudi-Qatari standoff is in India's interest. During his first term in office, PM Modi had established a personal rapport with all key players involved in the crisis. The government should leverage this to initiate a dialogue process with the leaders in the region.
- China has managed to entice the Gulf Arab countries to endorse and partake in its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.
  India will have to expand its trade basket and move into investment projects with the Gulf Arab countries. The Indo-Omani joint fertiliser company in Sur and India's economic partnership with Jordan presents a model and precedent for more energised Indian investment in the Gulf economies.
  The government should also encourage the private sector to expand its presence in the Middle Eastern economies, especially the Persian Gulf region.
- India should expand its presence in the Israeli economy and technology market through selective but aggressive investments aimed at technology acquisition.
  A robust cybersecurity cooperation with Israel should be explored.
- India's growing political engagements with the Middle East must be given more extensive publicity within the country. This will not only generate broader domestic support for it but also enhance India's influence in the region

Conclusion:

While the government has engaged actively in last few years with the Middle Eastern countries, it is now time for action.

Connecting the dots:

- The government in last few years had invested considerable political capital, time and resources in cultivating critical players in the Middle East. It is time to reap the fruits of political investments and elevate the engagements to a higher level.

Modi, Imran exchange pleasantries at Bishkek

Part of: Prelims and mains GS II: International relations

In news

Fight against Terrorism:

- Addressing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit, PM Modi highlighted the spirit and ideals of the SCO to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism.
- To combat the menace of terrorism, countries will have to come out of their narrow purview to unite against it, he said.
- Prime Minister called on the SCO member states to cooperate under the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) against terrorism.
- The Bishkek Declaration urged the international community to encourage global cooperation to fight terrorism, without politicisation and double standards; with respect for the sovereignty and independence of all countries.
- It sought the support of the member countries to work towards a consensus on adopting the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.
- The summit signed a document titled 'Roadmap for Further Action of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.
- The other agreements on sports, mass media, coordination of humanitarian affairs, tourism, healthcare were signed.

Do you know?

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):

The Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) was established in the year 2004 at the Tashkent Summit. SCO-RATS is a permanent body established to bring about coordination and interaction between member states in ensuring security in the region. The Regional Antiterrorism Structure works on information sharing and joint counter terrorism measures between the member states. Post the Astana summit declaration of 2005, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has emerged as a regional security organization.

PM hits out at trade protectionism; Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Part of Prelims: International relations Mains: GS Paper II – International relations

In news

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hit out at unilateralism and trade protectionism, and said there is a need for a rules-based, anti-discriminatory and all inclusive WTO-centred multilateral trading system.

Economic cooperation is the basis of our people's future... We need a rule-based, transparent, anti-discriminatory, open and all-inclusive WTO-centred multilateral trading system focused so that the interests of every country, specially the developing ones, can be taken care of.

India's stand

India is committed to ensuring a favourable environment for the economic cooperation between the SCO member-countries.

SCO members stand

The SCO member-states said the situation in global politics and economy remains turbulent and tense, and the process of economic globalisation is being hindered by the growing unilateral protectionist policies and other challenges in international trade`

The Bishkek Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation stressed the importance of deepening cooperation to build a transparent and stable environment for trade.

India to impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 American goods

Part of Prelims and mains GS II international relations and GS III Economics

In news

- The US has withdrawn the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits to India, effective 5th June.
- India has accepted the decision of the US to withdraw GSP benefits gracefully, and would work towards making the exports competitive.

- It was also clarified that the duty hikes were against the tariff hikes on steel and aluminium products by the U.S. and not because it withdrew duty-free benefits to Indian exporters.
- America had in March last year imposed 25 per cent tariff on steel and a 10 per cent import duty on aluminium products. As India is one of the major exporters of these items to the US, the US decision has revenue implication of about $240 million on Indian steel and aluminium products.
- India had repeatedly postponed the imposition of retaliatory tariffs since they were first announced in June 2018.
- India has also dragged the US to the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism over the imposition of import duties on steel and aluminium.
- India's exports to the US in 2017-18 stood at $47.9 billion, while imports were at $26.7 billion. The trade balance is in favour of India.

Bhutan on relations with India and China

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS II: International Relations

Background

India Bhutan relations rest on the mindset of the visionary leadership in two countries. Bhutan is also part of the BIMSTEC grouping that India says it is now promoting over the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

India Bhutan Relations

Mangdechhu Hydropwer project in Bhutan, with the contribution of India, is in the final stages of completion now.

Other bilateral projects that are being worked on:

- The South Asia Satellite programme,
- A stand-alone, multi-disciplinary hospital India is willing to support
- Another government-to-government mega-hydropower project on the Sankosh river

Issues in India Bhutan Relations:

- Tariffs and Cross-border Trade in Electricity (CBTE) policy that first came out in India (in 2016) wasn't friendly to Bhutan's interests.
- After Bhutan requested some changes, New Delhi agreed to change them.

- On BBIN: Bhutan need connectivity to enhance economic growth, but it is the smallest country in this partnership, and they have a very high commitment to environmental conservation. They are committed to balance their desire to preserve our environment, tradition and culture too.
- Geographically, South Asian countries are grouped together but they aren't doing well economically together.

On border issues (with China):

- Bhutan stick to their stand that the status quo must be maintained. No side should do anything without informing the other side at the border.
- Bhutan does not have diplomatic relations with any of the P-5 (UN Security Council Permanent members), which is our policy.

ECONOMY

Economic Reforms 2.0

Introduction:

The BJP now has an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha, hopes have picked up again of a radical reorganisation of the economy that improves the "collective good". There is a long list of reforms that often appear on wish-lists, each discussed for decades.

- For example, the problems of the railways have been repeatedly documented, their criticality for the economy highlighted, and suggestions for ending the government's monopoly, splitting it, corporatising it, listing it or privatising it have been made.
- Administrative reforms were first discussed more than five decades ago.
- India's laggard manufacturing has similarly dominated economic literature and the voices of commentators for a long time.
- The challenges of power distribution: Notoriously inefficient state-government monopolies; or on agriculture, where India's workforce remains disproportionately large.

Moving towards conclusion:

There are a few areas where significant background work has been done, and the process needs to move towards conclusion.

- Labour reforms: More than 40 laws with often contradictory clauses are to be replaced by four new laws (or codes); The first of these (the code on wages) now needs to be legislated. The code on labour could be next.
- There are some long-standing issues like urban infrastructure and affordable housing where intent has been shown and efforts made, but with limited success so far: Continued focus would be of the essence.
- The realisation in the past few years that there is scope for significant improvement in the abysmally low direct tax to GDP ratio also needs to see some follow-through.

Recent challenges:

India's growing dependence on imported energy:

- One cannot grow economically without consuming more dense forms of energy, and India either does not have domestic sources of dense energy, or does a poor job in

extracting and using them. As a result, import dependency is rising, creating growth risks.

PSUs dominated financial systems:

- The government tried to privatise PSUs by selling the shares to private banks and NBFCs. This had worked (even if unintentionally) in airlines and telecom, but once the NBFCs growth slowed due to a funding crunch, the problems in this approach have become obvious.
- The recent economic slowdown is perhaps worsened by a lack of financial capacity in the system: A decisive approach on the financial architecture in India is necessary.

Slowing foreign capital inflows:

- Total capital inflows as a share of GDP last year fell back to 2002 levels, and can become a cap on economic growth.
- The objective should not just be to attract more foreign capital, as it can cause undesirable volatility, but to prudently assess which risks are worth taking, given the changing domestic and global environments.

Better measurement and transparency:

- Everyone being on the same page on where our fiscal deficits are, where our growth is, and if we are creating enough jobs, is important.
- Even if some of the distrust on growth metrics is politically generated, there is no doubt that the Indian economy is very hard to measure, and that the time spent debating whether the economy is growing or not is a waste.

Challenges:

- Reforms are disruptive, and the more radical ones almost by definition involve uncertainty. Issues in execution can imperil even the best intended changes.
- Given that reforms use up political capital, or goodwill of the masses, it is tempting to target incremental improvement.
- Even steps that improve the “collective good” have interest groups that would lose economic power. The losers can exert more pressure in the near term than the beneficiaries whose gains can be more diffuse.

Conclusion:

Spending the political capital earned by the new government to push through some long pending decisions will act as a stimulus for our economy.

Connecting the dots:

- Various economic reforms have been taken in recent times; the process needs to move towards conclusion. In the same light the recent challenges need to be tackled with in order to make Indian economy robust. Comment.

Structural reforms for tackling economic slowdown

Background:

Economic slowdown:

- Official estimates released recently show GDP growth slowed to a five-year low of 6.8% in 2018-19, even as the unemployment rate rose to a 45-year high of 6.1% in 2017-18.
- Agriculture gross value added (GVA) growth is estimated at negative 0.1% and manufacturing GVA growth at 3.1% in the January-March quarter.
- The economy is struggling with an investment and a manufacturing slowdown, rural distress, unremunerative farm incomes, stagnating exports, a banking and financial mess and a jobs crisis.
- Sales figures from fast moving goods makers and continuing production cuts at car manufacturers confirm that consumption spending have slowed.

The economic priority for the new government ought to be credible course correction in policy — its formulation, articulation and the setting of goals.

Reforms taken in past:

- Structural reforms — spanning an overhaul of labour and land policies and a much-needed manufacturing push, 'Make In India', for absorbing the slack from the farms — had been abandoned by the end of 2015.
- The initial energy and enthusiasm gave way to misadventures such as demonetisation and the poorly designed rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime.
- The decrepit public banking system and the problems of the financial sector received little policy attention.
- Even the insolvency and bankruptcy reform, a sound economic reform, that got rolled out rather gradually and tentatively is already in danger of getting diluted.
- The Constitution was hurriedly amended for rolling out reservations based on economic criteria and that fiscal giveaways for middle class Indians and farmers dominated the Interim Budget presented in February without considering the magnitude of the challenge on the economic front.

Way ahead:

- **Generating sustainable livelihoods:**
  Public provision of toilets, cooking gas connections and dwellings or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) wage jobs and income supplement schemes are temporary sources of relief. They are not an economic growth model or strategies for reducing poverty. They can help the poor survive by providing meagre resources for subsistence.
  Reducing poverty needs economic growth to generate sustainable livelihoods for the poor. And this cannot be remedied by redistributive taxation policies alone.
  The government's 'Make In India' strategy was a step in the right direction, and needs to be revived. Done right, it can absorb the slack from the farms.
- Few organised sector jobs get generated in India because industries prefer capital-intensive production despite the economy's relative abundance of low-wage labour.
  If production were less capital-intensive, more organised sector jobs would be created. Plus, labour's bargaining power would improve.

The government needs to take up the backlog of economic reforms pending since the first burst in the 1990s.

- For the role they play in jobs creation, smaller firms ought to be incentivised with easy credit and taxation norms.

Data collection

Lastly, no evolution of the policy paradigm will be possible if the crisis of credibility in the collection, estimation and presentation of official statistics is not addressed appropriately.

Conclusion:

The new government must leverage the public trust voters have placed in it to get the economy on track. Structural reforms with meticulous planning and proper implementation will help.

Connecting the dots:

- Official data shows India is facing an economic slowdown. Structural reforms ensuring more job creation will help. Elucidate.

The Nandan Nilekani panel on deepening digital payments

In news:

The RBI constituted the five-member committee in January to review the status of digitization of payments, identify gaps in the ecosystem, and suggest ways of plugging them.

It was tasked to suggest a medium-term strategy for deepening digital payments and measures to strengthen safety and security. The high-level committee on deepening of digital payments, led by Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, has recommended a reduction in costs to widen the acceptance infrastructure and improve digital financial inclusion.

The report noted that while the digital payments ecosystem has made substantial progress on the issuance side, there needs to be an improvement on the demand or acceptance side of the ecosystem.

Background:

Per capita digital transactions stand at 22 in March 2019 and are expected to increase to 220 by March 2022, according to the committee. This will lead to an increase in the number of users of digital transactions from 100 million to 300 million. At present, India has a large currency in circulation to GDP ratio, when compared with other countries.

Recommendations:

Reduction in Fees & Taxes:

- 15-basis-point cut in the interchange fee for use of banks' ATM networks by customers of other banks make sense.
- A major suggestion to increase both digital acceptance and tax compliance is that businesses be provided with tax incentives calibrated on the proportion of digital payments in their receipts.
- Removal of all charges on digital payment transactions for the convenience of customers.
- The government should continue the current scheme to refund the merchant discount rate for small value transactions (under₹2,000) beyond December 2019 for another two years.

Improving ease of usage:

- To move away from plastic, and let the merchant use only the phone and a QR code. This will make digital payments seamless and convenient for customers. Merchants can generate their own code that will be interoperable with banks, doing away with card-swipe terminals.
- The panel also recommended the creation of a No-KYC wallet with a maximum value of ₹2,000 in the wallet and maximum spending capped at ₹10,000 per month, with the aim of boosting digital payments.

Expanding the horizon:

- To expand the UPI payments platform to foreign currency remittances by the NRIs and to settle residents' payments when they travel overseas — just as Chinese users can use WeChat — makes eminent sense.
- Another is that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) consider setting up an acceptance development fund, which is used to develop new merchants in poorly served areas.
- Creation of a digital financial inclusion index so that progress in an area can be measured along a common scale, indicating the evolution of the users and steps taken for correcting the imbalance.
- The government, being the single-largest participant in payments, take the lead on all aspects of digitisation of payments. Need to provide citizens with the option to pay digitally for all payments to government and public sector agencies.

Improving security:

- The RBI and the Centre to put in place a mechanism to monitor digital payment systems and make aggregated information based on blocks and PIN codes, available to all players on a monthly basis.

Conclusion:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government must target growth in the volume of digital payments by a factor of 10 in three years, leading to doubling in value relative to gross domestic product (GDP), as per the committee.

This growth will be driven by a shift from high-value, low-volume, high-cost transactions to low-value, high-volume, low-cost transactions.

Connecting the dots:

- The digital payments ecosystem has made substantial progress in India. In this light discuss the recommendation of the Nandan Nilekani panel on deepening digital payments.

SEBI mulls norms to reward whistle-blowers

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS III Indian Economy

In news:

The Capital Market regulator, SEBI has proposed an informant mechanism to blow the whistle on insider trading cases.

What is Insider Trading?

- Insider trading is defined in the SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 2015 ('PIT Regulations') to mean trading of securities while in possession of unpublished price sensitive information ('UPSI').
- Insider trading is essentially a malpractice wherein trade of a company's securities is undertaken by people who by virtue of their work have access to the otherwise non-public information which can be crucial for making investment decisions.
- As per the SEBI Act, insider trading is punishable with a penalty which shall not be less than 10 lakhs. The maximum penalty could be as high as Rs 25 crore or three times the amount of profits made out of insider trading, whichever is higher. The Act also prescribes that insider trading is punishable with a prison term of up to 10 years.

Full disclosure: On SEBI norm for financial disclosure

Introduction

In the backdrop of IL&FS crisis, SEBI issued reguating norms for credit rating agencies in November 2018. Again now in June 2019 further disclosure norms issued by SEBI.

Do you know?

A credit rating agency is an entity which assesses the ability and willingness of the issuer company for timely payment of interest and principal on a debt instrument.
The rating is assigned to a security or an instrument. The Credit rating agencies are regulated by SEBI.

Based on the norms issued by the SEBI in June, 2019, the credit rating agencies will have to:

- The CRAs would now be required to provide their rationale for the rating.
- The Disclosure of probability of default by the companies has been made mandatory for all the CRAs.
- The CRAs have also been asked to disclose all the sensitive factors which could possibly trigger changes in credit ratings.
- In order to improve the transparency in the ratings, the CRAs have been asked to disclose all the liquidity related parameters such as access to credit, liquidity coverage ratio, adequacy of cash flows for servicing maturing debt obligation, etc.
- The adequacy of the liquidity is to be denoted in terms of standard terminologies such as Superior, Adequate, Stretched & Poor. It would address the problem of ambiguity.

- The CRAs must publish information on their performance in the rating of debt instruments compares with a benchmark created by SEBI.

Remaining concerns to be addressed:

- The "issuer-pays" model where the entity that issues the instrument also pays the ratings agency for its services often leads to a situation of conflict of interest.
- The credit rating market in India has high barriers to entry leading to lack of competition and hence adversely affects the interests of the investors.
- The Credit rating agencies have to come up with lucrative business models which put the interests of the investors above the interests of borrowers.

Connecting the dots:

What are credit rating agencies? Regulating credit rating agencies will have positive effect on debt and securities market. comment.

Jalan panel report on RBI reserves

Part of Mains: GS III – Indian Economy and related issues

In news

- The Bimal Jalan committee, which is looking into the size of capital reserves that the RBI should hold, will have one more meeting before finalising its report to be submitted to the apex bank by the month-end.
- The six-member panel, under former RBI Governor Jalan was appointed on December 26, 2018, to review the economic capital framework (ECF) for the Reserve Bank after the Finance Ministry wanted the RBI to follow global best practices and transfer more surplus to the government.

(**Note:** For further details on this topic read: IASBaba Current Affairs 23 April 2019)

UK Sinha Panel on MSMEs

In news:

The RBI-appointed U K Sinha panel on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) has made a slew of sensible recommendations. From a new code to rid the sector of inspector raj to improving credit access and tackling distress, the report covers a lot of ground.

MSMEs: Key engine of growth

The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector in India is not only a key engine of growth, contributing more than 28% of the GDP and about 45% to manufacturing output. It is also a true reflection of economics where people really matter. Providing employment to about 111 million people, the sector's health is crucial to the economy's vitality and society's well being.

Multiple challenges faced by the sector includes the absence of formalisation, stilted access to credit, delayed payments and infrastructural bottlenecks.

Recommendations:

- 13-year-old law, the MSME Development Act, 2006 — be changed to prioritise market facilitation and ease of doing business.
  Observing that many Indian start-ups that are at the forefront of innovation are drawn to look overseas, given the conducive business environment and the availability of infrastructure and exit policies, the committee suggest that a new law ought to address the sector's biggest bottlenecks, including access to credit and risk capital.
- Reimagining solutions to improve credit flow to MSMEs.
  Repurposing the Small Industries Development Bank of India. In its expanded role, it is envisaged that the SIDBI could not only deepen credit markets for MSMEs in under-served regions by being a provider of comfort to lenders including NBFCs and micro-finance institutions, but also become a market-maker for SME debt.
- The panel has made a case for greater adoption of technology-facilitated solutions to a plethora of problems encountered by the sector.
- To address the issue of delayed payments, the mandatory uploading of invoices above a specified amount to an information utility has been recommended. The aim is to name and shame buyers of goods and services from MSMEs to expedite settlements to suppliers.
- Expediting the integration of information on the Government e-Marketplace, or GeM, platform with the Trade Receivables Discounting System. The goal here is to boost liquidity at MSMEs.
- Banks should switch to cash flow-based lending, especially once account aggregators are operational and able to provide detailed data on borrowings. The report has suggested banks to base credit decisions on cash flow rather than collateral.
- Doubling collateral-free loans for MSMEs to Rs 20 lakh, raising the loan limit sanctioned under Mudra to Rs 20 lakh, creating a stressed asset fund of Rs 5,000 crore and a government-sponsored fund of funds of Rs 10,000 crore to support MSME equity.

Conclusion:
The RBI and the Centre should act on the above recommendations in order to help actualise the sector's true economic potential.

Connecting the dots:

- The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector in India is a key engine of growth. In this light discuss the recommendations of UK Sinha panel.

Govt makes changes to Employees State Insurance Scheme

Part of Prelims: Indian Economy

In news
The Government has recently decided to reduce the contribution of the employees and employers under the Employees State Insurance Scheme. The reduced rates will come into effect on July 1, 2019.

Do you know?

Details about Employees State Insurance Scheme

What is it?

Employees' State Insurance Scheme of India is a multi-dimensional Social Security Scheme tailored to provide Socio-economic protection to the 'employees' in the organized sector against the events of sickness, maternity, disablement and death due to employment injury and to provide medical care to the insured employees and their families.

Who administers the Scheme?

The ESI Scheme is administered by a statutory corporate body called the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

How is the Scheme financed?

The ESI scheme is a self-financing scheme. The ESI funds are primarily built out of contribution from employers and employees payable monthly at a fixed percentage of wages paid.

Coverage of the Scheme

It extends to all the factories employing 10 or more employees. Further, it covers all the employees with wages up to Rs 21,000.

A case for balanced BITs

Background:
Indian economy faces enormous challenges.

- The GDP growth rate is at a five-year low.
- Domestic consumption is sinking.
- The business confidence index has plunged.
- India has recorded its highest unemployment rate in the last 45 years.
- Foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows to India in 2018-19 contracted by 1%, according to the government's own data.

To add to this list of woes is a claim made by Arvind Subramanian, India's former Chief Economic Adviser, that India's GDP has been overestimated.

Lost opportunity:

- The contraction in FDI inflows comes at a time when global supply chains are shifting base as a result of the ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China.
- India has failed to attract firms exiting China. Many of these supply chains have relocated to Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia.
- India is clearly not the natural/first option for these firms for a host of reasons, such as poor infrastructure, rigid land and labour laws, a deepening crisis in the banking sector and a lack of structural economic reforms.

Termination of BITs:

- The decline in the FDI growth rate has coincided with India's decision, in 2016, to unilaterally terminate bilateral investment treaties (BITs) with more than 60 countries; this is around 50% of the total unilateral termination of BITs globally from 2010 to 2018.
- Unilateral termination of BITs on such a mass scale projects India as a country that does not respect international law.
- India also adopted a new inward-looking Model BIT in 2016 that prioritises state interests over protection to foreign investment.
- The decision to terminate BITs and adopt a state-friendly Model BIT was a reaction to India being sued by several foreign investors before international arbitration tribunals.

(A **bilateral investment treaty** (**BIT**) is an agreement establishing the terms and conditions for private investment by nationals and companies of one state in another state.)

Bad regulation:

- A large number of issues arose either because of inordinate judicial delays in deciding on the enforceability of arbitration awards or because judiciary ruled in certain cases without examining India's BIT obligations such as en masse cancellation of the 2G telecom licences in 2012.
- The government got the income tax laws retrospectively amended in 2012 to overrule the Supreme Court's judgment in favour of Vodafone and cancelled Devas Multimedia's spectrum licences in 2011 without following due process, thus adversely impacting Mauritian and German investors.

These cases are examples of bad state regulation.

Way ahead:

- The Ministry of Finance and Corporate Affairs should invest extensively in developing state capacity so that the Indian state starts internalising BITs and is not caught on the wrong foot before an international tribunal.
- True, India's BITs gave extensive protection to foreign investment with scant regard for state's interests. This design flaw could have been corrected by India negotiating new balanced treaties and then replacing the existing ones with the new ones instead of terminating them unilaterally, which has created a vacuum.
- In correcting the pro-investor imbalance in India's BITs, India went to the other extreme and created a pro-state imbalance as evident in the Model BIT. Correcting this imbalance should be high on the reform agenda of the government.

Conclusion:

Clarity, continuity and transparency in domestic regulations and a commitment to a balanced BIT framework would help India project itself as a nation committed to the rule of law, both domestically and internationally, and thus shore up investor confidence.
As the 2019 World Investment Report confirms, since India is fast becoming a leading outward investor, balanced BITs would also help in protecting Indian investment abroad.

Connecting the dots:

- Balanced Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) would help in improving the inward FDI. Comment.

Banks' association tweaks inter creditor agreement

Part of Prelims and mains GS III Banking in India

In news

- The Indian Banks' Association has tweaked the inter-creditor agreement (ICA) that was framed by the Sashakt Committee, to keep it in line with the revised guidelines of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on stressed assets resolution.
- The revised norm had mandated that if there was a default by any lender, all lenders should review the borrower account within 30 days of the default, which is termed 'review period', and to chalk out a resolution plan. It has been made mandatory for all the lenders to enter into an ICA within the review period.
- Any decision agreed to by lenders representing 75% by value of total outstanding credit facilities and 60% of lenders by number shall be binding upon all the lenders.

Creating a valuable economy

Introduction:

At the meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the target of a $5 trillion economy for India by 2024. What we would hope to find once we have reached our destination is the question.

A quantum leap in the size of the economy cannot be achieved easily. It will require design, funding and governance. In this path the pursuit should be to create a valuable economy.

Characteristics of a valuable economy:

- Indians should feel empowered by the economy.
  India is placed very low in the United Nations' World Happiness Report. Happiness, best understood as a sense of well-being, is directly related to empowerment, or being able to undertake the functionings we value. This is, in the first instance, related to being educated and experiencing good health. We are in India facing an education sector that is broken down and the majority are battling with almost non-existent public health infrastructure. The private sector has some worthy initiatives in these areas but they await an effective public presence on a gigantic scale.
  So, the first attribute of the valuable economy would be **access to quality health and education for all**.

- Equality of opportunity:
  For over three decades now income inequality has been rising in India. Now some part of inequality of opportunity is related to unequal distribution of income but a part of it is not.
  Gender inequality manifested as women having less opportunity in life is not going to go away with a re-distribution of income along class lines or across social groupings. India is a serious outlier in this regard, and becoming richer as a society may do little to change the status quo. Shockingly, a sex ratio, already unfavourable to women, has shown a secular worsening since 1947.
  Inequality in India can only be ended by **equalising capabilities** across individuals. Concerted public action via education is the means to this outcome. Income transfers, pushed relentlessly by policy entrepreneurs, evade the issue altogether.
- **Conserving nature**
  An economy, whatever its size, cannot be meaningfully evaluated independently of the extent of presence in it of natural capital.
  Two-thirds of the world's most polluted cities are in India, when we accept less than a fifth of its population. Air pollution shortens lives and lowers productivity, reducing the capacity to earn a living when alive.
  The poor are the most affected as they cannot afford to live in gated communities that somehow manage to commandeer scarce natural resources.

Conclusion:

Any improvement in the life of the majority would require a re-alignment of the growth process so that it is less damaging. This would very likely require that we have slower growth but the process can be configured to channel more of it towards poorer groups. We may end up in a situation of less tangible goods in the aggregate than otherwise but one in which more people are happier than in the past. Such an economy is more valuable.

Connecting the dots:

- The economy must be evaluated in terms of how much it contributes to the ease of our living. The pursuit should be to create a valuable economy. Comment.

'Defaulter count in PSBs has risen 60% since FY15'

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Indian Economy

In news

- The number of wilful defaulters in nationalised banks has increased by more than 60% to 8,582 to March 2019 from 2014-15.
- By the end of the 2014-15 fiscal, the figure had stood at 5,349.

Wilful defaulter

A wilful defaulter is an entity or a person that has not paid a loan back despite the ability to repay it.A wilful defaulter is an entity or a person that has not paid a loan back despite the ability to repay it.

Strengthening Fiscal Federalism

Background:

India's Constitution-makers thought of India as a union of States with a centripetal bias, done, advisedly, to preserve the unity and integrity of a newly fledged nation. Since then, the Indian economy, polity, demography and society have undergone many changes.
It is in this context that India's fiscal federalism needs to be re-visited.

Imbalances in India's fiscal federalism:

- A vertical imbalance arises because the tax systems are designed in a manner that yields much greater tax revenues to the Central government when compared to the State or provincial governments; the Constitution mandates relatively greater responsibilities to the State governments.
  For example, in India, post the advent of Goods and Services Tax (GST), the share of States in the public expenditure is 60% while it is 40% for the Centre to perform their constitutionally mandated duties.
- The horizontal imbalances arise because of differing levels of attainment by the States due to differential growth rates and their developmental status in terms of the state of social or infrastructure capital.
- Traditionally, Finance Commissions have dealt with these imbalances in a stellar manner.

Way ahead: Removing the imbalance

Strengthening NITI Aayog:

In the past, the Planning Commission used to give grants to the States as conditional transfers using the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula. Now with the Planning Commission disbanded, there is a

vacuum especially as the NITI Aayog is primarily a think tank with no resources to dispense, which renders it toothless to undertake a "transformational" intervention. On the other hand, it is too much to expect the Union Finance Commission to do the dual job. There is an urgent need for an optimal arrangement.

- NITI Aayog 2.0 should receive significant resources to promote accelerated growth in States that are lagging, and overcome their historically conditioned infrastructure deficit, thus reducing the developmental imbalance.
  In short, the NITI Aayog should be engaged with the allocation of "transformational" capital in a formulaic manner.
- NITI Aayog 2.0 should also be mandated to create an independent evaluation office which will monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the utilisation of such grants. In doing so, it should not commit the mistake of micro-management or conflicts with line departments.
  It must be also accorded a place at the high table of decision-making as it will need to objectively buy-in the cooperation of the richer States as their resources are transferred to the poorer ones.

Ushering in decentralisation:

The above perspective will have to be translated below the States to the third tier of government. This is crucial because intra-State regional imbalances are likely to be of even greater import than inter-State ones. Decentralisation, in letter and spirit, has to be the third pillar of the new fiscal federal architecture.

- De jure and de facto seriousness has to be accorded to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments.
- The missing local public finance must be birthed. One of the ways for this is through the creation of an urban local body/panchayati raj institutions consolidated fund. The Centre and States should contribute to the consolidated fund of the third tier.
- Further, the State Finance Commissions should be accorded the same status as the Finance Commission and the 3Fs of democratic decentralisation (funds, functions and functionaries) vigorously implemented. This will strengthen and deepen our foundational democratic framework.

Fine-tuning the GST:

It is to the credit of our democratic maturity that the GST Bill was passed unanimously by Parliament; but in its present form, it is far from flawless.

- It needs further simplification and extended coverage.

- We need to achieve the goal of a single rate GST with suitable surcharges on "sin goods," zero rating of exports and reforming the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) and the e-way bill.
- The GST Council should adopt transparency in its working, and create its own secretariat with independent experts aas its staff. This will enable it to undertake further reforms in an informed and transparent manner.

Conclusion:
NITI Aayog can play an important role in refreshing India's fiscal federalism. It is time we reboot the institution.

Connecting the dots:

- India's fiscal federalism needs to be re-visited in order to check the imbalances between the states and also between centre on one hand and states on the other. Comment.

Cash in circulation fell post note ban: FM

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Economics

In news

- Demonetisation, coupled with increased digital transactions and the reduced cash usage in the informal economy, led to a reduction in currency in circulation by ₹3.4 lakh crore, according to Finance Ministry
- The level of currency in circulation as of May 31, 2019, was significantly lower than what it would have been if demonetisation had not happened.
- The Reserve Bank of India data shows that the number of counterfeit bank notes detected decreased from 762,072 pieces in 2016-17, to 522,783 in 2017-18 and 317,389 pieces in 2018-19 and hence "demonetisation resulted in curbing of the counterfeit currency".
- Growth of digital transactions in terms of value has increased to ₹188.07 lakh crore in September 2018 from ₹112.27 lakh crore in November 2016. Digital transactions in terms of volume have increased to 241.88 crore in September 2018 from 91.83 crore.
- The demonetisation led to a "significant positive impact on most theatres of violence" in the country since illegally held cash formed a major chunk of terror-funding.
- The note ban rendered the cash held with terrorists worthless.

AGRICULTURE

Agri Reforms 2.0

Background

Series of reforms such as e-NAM and the price deficiency payments scheme to deal with farmers' distress over falling prices were introduced by the last government. The Centre, taking a leaf out of States such as Telangana and Odisha, introduced income support, indicating a paradigmatic shift in the direction of farm support policy.

Key Issues and Solutions:

Issues of overproduction:

A statistical analysis points out that farming has become drought-resilient, with food and horticulture output rising since 2015-16, despite a succession of below-normal or deficient monsoons. The output of milk, fish and eggs have increased sharply over the last decade. Farmers' income has not improved because of-

- The absence of demand.
- Absence of supply chain that can ensure viable farm gate prices while reaching the produce in time to the consumer.

Solutions:

- Agri-marketing reforms need to be foregrounded, going beyond the e-NAM initiative.
- Measures to promote self-sufficiency in crucial crops such as pulses from a nutritional point of view need to be kept up. Pulses are a big plus for soil fertility and for their low water requirements.
- The sharp spurt in horticulture output should be sustained by improvements in marketing channels as well as in crop insurance. It is possible to introduce product differentiation in crop insurance schemes.
- Cold storages need more attention than ever before with rising horticulture potential.
- The state of food processing parks needs to be reviewed.
- It should also be ensured that all States implement the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestocks Marketing Act, 2017, and encourage investments in agri-processing. Doing away with APMC yards, without anything to take their place, is not a good idea as Bihar's experience has shown.

Low export growth:

Despite record-high food production, policy mis-management has seen agri imports growing at 9.8 per cent CAGR in the last five years while exports growth has been muted at 1.1 per cent CAGR.

- Institutional reforms such as creation of farmers' producers organisations can help in breaking credit, logistics and marketing bottlenecks.
- Centre should come up with long-term policies on exports and imports that help producers deal with non-tariff barriers.

Inappropriate crop choices:

Subsidies for paddy and cane in rainfed regions, such as free electricity, have led to inappropriate crop choices.

- The Centre must adopt a holistic approach towards water management and agriculture. Haryana's incentive scheme for shifting away from paddy is worth emulating.

Conclusion:

The Centre is on the right track in its farm policies; its policy mix needs to be fine-tuned. Continuity in income support and workable agri-marketing policies are called for.

Connecting the dots:

- While multiple reforms have been taken keep agricultural sector as a priority, more needs to be done. Comment.

Indian Agriculture: Improving global competitiveness

Background:

Indian industry is today complaining that the rural demand is collapsing. Tractor sales are down by 13 per cent, two-wheeler sales are down by 16 per cent, car sales are down by similar percentage, and even FMCG (fast move consumer goods) sales are down in April 2019 over April 2018.

One of the reasons is that India has never had any major agri-reforms and farmers' incomes have remained very low. So, if industry wants to prosper, we must aim at an agri-GDP growth of more than 4 per cent.

Issues:

- Need to raise farm productivity in a manner that can cut down unit costs and make Indian agriculture more competitive, enabling higher exports.
  Officials managing agri-trade need to pay heed to this massive failure as it has implications not only for overall agri-GDP growth, but also for slowing down of manufacturing growth due to sluggish demand for industrial products in rural areas.
- Restrictive policies constrain the private sector from building direct supply chains from farms to ports, which bypass the mandi system. This leads to a weak infrastructure for agri-exports. The net result of all this is that Indian farmers do not get full advantage of global markets.
- An obsessive focus on inflation targeting by suppressing food prices through myriad controls works against the farmer.

Improving global competitiveness:

- Investment in agri-R&D.
  Today, India spends roughly 0.7 per cent of agri-GDP on agri-R&D and extension together. This needs to double in the next five years. The returns are enormous.
  Example:
  The meagre investments in Pusa Basmati 1121 and 1509, for example, have yielded basmati exports between $ 4 and 5 billion annually.
  The returns from the sugarcane variety Co-0238 in Uttar Pradesh are similarly impressive. The recovery ratio has increased from about 9.2 in 2012-13 to more than 11 per cent today.
- Massive investments are also needed in managing our water resources more efficiently, to produce more with less.
- Investment in infrastructure for agri-exports value chains.

Conclusion:

Augmenting productivity should be accompanied with pushing for export markets. Improving competitiveness in Indian agriculture is must if the dream of doubling farmers' income by 2020 needs to be achieved.

Connecting the dots:

- Indian agriculture lacks global competitiveness. Analyze critically.

Over 12,000 suicide deaths by farmers in three years: Maharashtra

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS III Farmers' issues

In news

- In Maharashtra, despite spending over ₹19,000 crore on farm loan waiver, a total of 12,021 farmers have died in the State due to suicide between 2015 and 2018.
- First three months of this year (2019) saw 610 deaths of farmers.

Steps taken by Maharashtra government

- Over 50 lakh farmers would benefit from the loan waiver scheme and ₹24,000 crore will be spent for this.
- Of the total number, 43.32 lakh farmers have actually received benefits worth ₹19,000 crore.
- Out of 12,021 farmer suicides, a total of 6,888 cases qualified for compensation as per the norms.
- Out of these, kin of farmers in 6,845 cases have been paid ₹1 lakh aid.

Despite the loan waiver scheme and increasing expenditure on the agriculture sector, the farmer deaths in the state have not stopped.

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ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Sportswear giant set to tap Indian firms' PET project to cut virgin plastic use

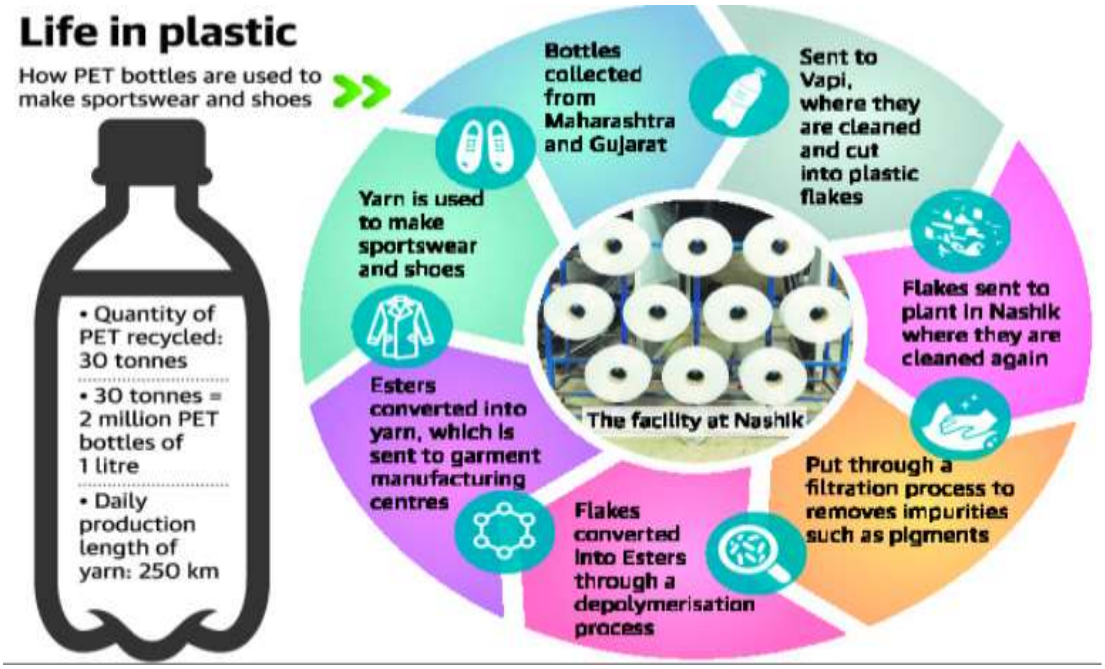
Part of: Environment and Ecology, Mains GS paper III: Environmental conservation

In News:

- Adidas aims at eliminating the use of virgin plastics in its products by 2024.
- According to the United Nations, around 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year with eight million tonnes of plastic waste ends up in the oceans.
- PET bottles are the main contributors to plastic waste globally and in India.
- It is taking help of Polygenta Technology Limited, a Maharashtra based company which is the only one company in the country to produce yarn out of discarded PET bottles.

Recycling in India; Downcycling and Upcycling

- PET material collection rate in India is nearly 80% — among the best in the world — but a good portion of these bottles are downcycled, eliminating the possibility of further recycling.
- **Downcycling** is reuse of waste in a manner that the recycled product is of lower value than the original material.
- The PET recycling by PTL uses an upcycling process which consumes 86% less water and 75% less energy than conventional manufacturing. However, it costs approximately 10% more.



Reversing the scale of priorities: Balancing Sustainable development

Introduction

The Madras High Court in P.V. Krishnamoorthy v. The Government of India Case quashed the notifications that were issued by NHAI for acquiring land for a proposed eight-lane expressway connecting Chennai to Salem. The Case now has gone to the Supreme Court whereby NHAI had challenged that verdict of the Madras High Court. However, for now the SC has refused the request of NHAI for a stay on the Madras High Court judgment.

Sustainable development

- In 1987, a **United Nations-backed committee** led by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro **Brundtland** proposed a long-term strategy which called for sustainable development, among other things. This **programme titled "Our Common Future"**, **defined the principle of sustainable development** as an endeavour to ensure that any development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs."
- **Amartya Sen** wrote: While the prominence accorded to sustainable development may be laudable, we must equally ask whether "the conception of human beings implicit in it is sufficiently capacious".

Madras High Court's judgment and the concerns raised

The Madras High Court's judgment in P. Krishnamoorthy case is well reasoned, whereby the HC has raised several questions about procedure with regards to environmental impact assessment (EIA) being carried out for developmental projects.

1st Concern:

- There was a failure to obtain an environmental clearance for the project before acquiring land. Whereby, according to the government, power to acquire land under the National Highways Act, 1956, was unconditional. There was no law mandating an EIA before efforts are made to acquire private land. The Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986, which required an EIA for the construction of a new highway (green field), did not decree such an assessment for the purposes of securing the land.

2nd Concern:

- Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Moreover, the SC in Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum Case (1996) has asserted that Sustainable Development is intrinsic to India's constitutional structure.
- However, it has been difficult to implement in practice the concept of sustainable development. Whereby what has happened is that a balance has been tried to be maintained between environment and the development project and in most cases the balance has been tilted towards development projects. So what happens is that if a development project that depletes groundwater or increases pollution but creates jobs, the project is undertaken whereby it is considered that current and even future generations would prefer a better economy rather than cleaner air or easier access to drinking water.

Conclusion:

- The Judgment tilts the balance in Sustainable development towards the environment. It has raised concerns over environmental impact of the project with cutting down of trees, poaching of animals, fragmenting forest land, apart from other environmental concerns.
- As Amartya Sen rightly wrote, "there is need for anti-emission policies that could help future generations to have the freedom to enjoy the fresh air that earlier generations enjoyed."

Connecting the dots:

The protection of environment stands in a higher pedestal when placed on scale with that of the economic interest. Comment.

G20 agrees to tackle ocean plastic waste

Part of: Prelims and GS mains III environment and pollution

In News

- Group of 20 Environment Ministers agreed to adopt a new implementation framework for actions to tackle the issue of marine plastic waste on a global scale.
- One of the top issues was ocean plastic waste as images of plastic debris-strewn beaches and dead animals with stomachs full of plastic have sparked outrage with many countries banning plastic bags outright.
- The new framework is aimed at facilitating further concrete action on marine waste, though on a voluntary basis, after the G20 Hamburg Summit in Germany adopted the "G20 action plan on marine litter" in 2017.

Life-cycle approach

- Under the new framework, G20 members will promote a comprehensive life-cycle approach to prevent and reduce plastic litter discharge to the oceans through various measures and international cooperation.
- They will also share best practices, promote innovation and boost scientific monitoring and analytical methodologies.

The mysterious case of GM Brinjal cultivation

Introduction

Brinjal production is extensively affected by insects: Brinjal fruit and shoot borer. Use of conventional chemical pesticides damaged the environment & affected human health.

About BT Brinjal

- BT Brinjal was developed to combat Brinjal fruit and shoot borer & minimizing the use of chemical pesticides.
- Mahyco, the largest seed company in India, in which Monsanto Co. has a 26% stake, developed the first BT Brinjal.
- It was approved for commercialization in India in 2009, but a moratorium on its release was issued until further, unspecified, tests were conducted. BT Brinjal was approved for commercial release in Bangladesh in 2013.

Application of biotechnology in Agriculture of India

In India, application of biotechnology in agriculture is being dealt with by three different Ministries/Dept.:

(1) Min. of Agriculture;
(2) Min. of EF&CC &
(3) Department of Biotechnology, Min. of S&T.

Development, cultivation and transboundary movement of GM crops is regulated so as to ensure the safety of animal health, human health and biodiversity.

In India, such regulations are provided in the Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms (HM) Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989 under the Environment Protection Act (1986).

The rules cover: All activities involving research and development of products containing GMOs including transgenic crops.

Appraisal of Genetically engineered products

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) functions in the MOEF&CC. As per Rules, 1989, it is responsible for appraisal of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.

The committee is also responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials.

Connecting the dots:

- Brinjal or BT Brinjal: why it is debated? Give your opinion.

India to host UN meet on land degradation in September

Part of Prelims and mains GS III Environment and ecology

In news

- India for the first time will host the 14th session of the Conference of Parties (COP-14) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019.
- It will see participation from at least 5,000 delegates from nearly 197 countries and will be held between September 2 and 14 in Delhi

- One of the primary functions of the COP is to review reports submitted by the Country Parties, detailing how they are carrying out their commitments. India will takeover the COP presidency from China for two years until the next COP in 2021.

India and UNCCD

- Ahead of the COP-14, India launched a flagship project, part of a larger international initiative called the Bonn Challenge, to enhance India's capacity for forest landscape restoration (FLR).
- It will be implemented during a pilot phase of three-and-a-half years in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Karnataka. The project will aim to develop and adapt the best practices and monitoring protocols for the country, and build capacity within the five pilot States. This will eventually be scaled up across the country
- India faces a severe problem of land degradation, or soil becoming unfit for cultivation. A 2016 report by the Indian Space Research Organisation found that about 29% of India's land (in 2011-13) was degraded, this being a 0.57% increase from 2003-05.
- At the previous edition of the COP, India had committed to restore 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by the year 2020, and an additional 8 million hectares by 2030.

The Bonn Challenge

- The Bonn Challenge is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land under restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.

The three sister conventions

- The United Nations has three major Conventions: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Established in 1994, the UNCCD is the only legally binding international agreement linking environment and development issues to the land agenda.

Bitcoin use causing huge CO2 emissions: Study

Part of Prelims and mains GS III Environment and ecology, Technology

Background:

- Bitcoin mining has increased rapidly in recent years, raising the question of whether it is imposing an additional burden on the climate.

- The use of Bitcoin — a popular virtual currency — emits over 22 megatonnes of carbon dioxide annually, comparable to the total emissions of cities such as Las Vegas and Vienna, a study has found.
- For a Bitcoin transfer to be executed and validated, a mathematical puzzle must be solved by an arbitrary computer in the global Bitcoin network.The network, which anyone can join, rewards the puzzle solvers in Bitcoin.
- The computing capacity used in this process — known as Bitcoin mining — has increased rapidly in recent years. Statistics show that it quadrupled in 2018 alone.
- The power consumption of the network depends primarily on the hardware used for Bitcoin mining. The annual electricity consumption by Bitcoin, as of November 2018, to be about 46 TWh.
- Naturally there are bigger factors contributing to climate change. However, the carbon footprint is big enough to make it worth discussing the possibility of regulating cryptocurrency mining in regions where power generation is especially carbon-intensive.
- To improve the ecological balance, one possibility might be to link more mining farms to additional renewable generating capacity.

A water clinic for elephants opens on the banks of the Yamuna

Part of Prelims and mains GS III environment and ecology

In news

- India has opened its first specialised hydrotherapy treatment for elephants suffering from arthritis, joint pain and foot ailments near the Wildlife SOS' Elephant Conservation and Care Centre (ECCC), which currently houses 20 rescued elephants and is run in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and the NGO Wildlife SOS.
- Situated on the banks of the Yamuna in Mathura, the new hydrotherapy jumbo pool is 11-foot-deep and has 21 high pressure jet sprays that create water pressure that massage the elephants' feet and body and help in increasing blood circulation
- The hospital started in 2018 already offers state-of-the-art modern facilities including wireless digital X-ray, laser treatment, dental X-ray, thermal imaging and ultrasonography to treat injured, sick and geriatric elephants.
- An effective complementary treatment for the elephants' painful joints and feet is **hydrotherapy**, a form of physical therapy that uses the therapeutic benefits of water to perform physical rehabilitation in animals.

Water Crisis in the making

Background:

While water deprivation is especially acute in regions like Marathwada in Maharashtra, it afflicts large parts of India with varying degrees of severity.

- Some parts of Karnataka, for example, shut schools for an extra week on account of water scarcity.
- Incidents of violence over water have been reported from across the country.
- In Madhya Pradesh, which has had several water related clashes, the state government asked superintendents of police of all 52 districts to guard water sources.

This is unprecedented. It also portends a future of worsening strife over what many of us take for granted.

2018 NITI Aayog report: The scale of the water crisis in perspective

- India has only 4% of the planet's fresh-water for 16% of its population.
- According to the NITI Aayog report, India is the world's biggest groundwater extractor.
- As things stand, it forecasts that 21 cities, including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad, will run out of groundwater by 2020.
- 40% of our citizens will have no access to drinking water by 2030.
- As many as 600 million people are already estimated to face "high-to-extreme" water stress every year.

Crisis in the making:

This crisis had been in the making for decades, with ecologists who warned of development myopia brushed aside in favour of concrete signs of economic success.

- All manner of structures have encroached upon lakes and rivers with impunity, while industrial waste and sewage inflows render various water bodies toxic.
- The problem is compounded by the large-scale adoption of thermocol and plastic plates and glasses even in the countryside, the non-biodegradable wastes ends up killing rural pools of water that have traditionally served entire villages.
- Groundwater levels, meanwhile, have fallen calamitously. In the farm sector, because of the practice of flood irrigation and switchovers to water-soaking crops such as sugarcane and rice.
- Water theft by tanker gangs does much of the harm. Water-tanker operators profit by digging borewells, often illegally and under political patronage, to sell water at scandalous prices to the needy. The phenomenon is so rampant that the pace of groundwater extraction invariably outstrips the rate of aqueous recharge.

Conclusion:

The government's aim of assuring every citizen piped water by 2024 is indeed laudable. For that goal to be met, however, many challenges need to be overcome.

- Agriculture would need to conserve water through drip irrigation and other methods.
- Groundwater replenishment will have to be done in mission mode.
- Rainwater harvesting must turn voluminous.
- For now, perhaps tanker gangs could be put out of business by state water supplies.

Connecting the dots:

- Water deprivation afflicts large parts of India with varying degrees of severity. In this light comment on the challenges to achieve the goal of piped water to every citizen by 2024.

Himalayan glaciers are melting twice as fast since 2000: study

Part of: Prelims and mains GS III Environment and Ecology

In news:

Comparing data obtained by Cold War-era spy satellites with images from modern stereo satellites, scientists have shown that Himalayan glaciers have lost more than a quarter of their ice mass since 1975, with melting occurring twice as fast after the turn of the century as average temperatures rose.

Background

- In the 1970s, at the height of the Cold War, the U.S. had deployed spy satellites that orbited the globe and took thousands of photographs, using a telescopic camera system, for reconnaissance purposes.
- More than four decades later, scientists are using those same images to show the devastating impact of a warming Earth on the Himalayan glaciers.
- The study goes on to assert that rising temperatures are responsible for the accelerating loss.

WHO writes new prescription to prevent misuse of antibiotics

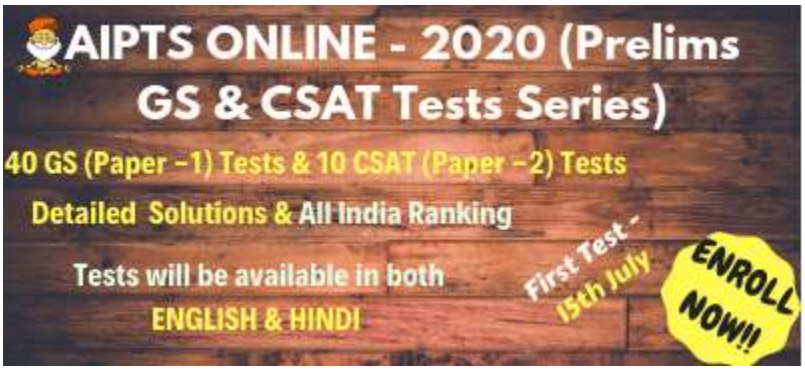
Part of: Prelims and mains GS II Health GS III environmental concerns

In news:

WHO estimates that more than 50% of antibiotics in many countries are used inappropriately for treatment of viruses, when they only treat bacterial infections, or are the wrong choice of antibiotic (broader spectrum), thus contributing to the spread of antimicrobial resistance.

'Access, Watch and Reserve'

- WHO has suggested the adoption of 'Access, Watch and Reserve', an approach that specifies which antibiotics to use for the most common and serious infections, which ones ought to be available at all times in the healthcare system, and those that must be used sparingly, or reserved and used only as a last resort.
  This approach will reduce the spread of antimicrobial resistance, adverse events and costs.
- The new campaign aims to increase the proportion of global consumption of antibiotics in the 'Access' group to at least 60%, and to reduce use of the antibiotics most at risk of resistance.
- Using 'Access' antibiotics lowers the risk of resistance because they are 'narrow-spectrum' antibiotics (that target a specific microorganism rather than several).
  They are also less costly because they are available in generic formulations.
- In India, the Health Ministry has made it mandatory to display a 5mm-thick red vertical band on the packaging of prescription-only drugs to sensitise people to be cautious while buying these medicines that are widely sold without prescriptions.



ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Asiatic Golden cat wears new colours

Part of Prelims: Environment and Biodiversity

In News

Scientists have discovered six different 'colour morphs' of the Asiatic golden cat in Arunachal Pradesh.

Do you know?

- **Asiatic Golden cat** is a medium-sized wild cat native to north-eastern Indian subcontinent and is listed as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- **Colour morphs** are basically occurrence of two or more discrete colour forms of the animal within a population, due to a genetic mutation. For example- Black panther is a color morph of the common leopard.

Assam temple bids adieu to rare turtle hatchlings

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS III: Environment and Ecology

In news

- The Ugratara Temple, one of the city's landmarks, organised a special darshan of 34 hatchlings of the freshwater turtle, Black softshell turtle.
- Members of the temple committee and devotees turned up for what was essentially a ceremony to welcome and bid goodbye to these hatchlings.
- The welcome was because the eggs of black softshell were collected from temple ponds for incubation at the Assam State Zoo. And the goodbye was because these hatchlings will be reintroduced in the wild, never to return.
- Jorpukhuri translates into twin tanks, one of which abuts Ugratara Temple that is dedicated to Goddess Tara, a 'fiery' avatar of Kali.
- The black softshell turtle is extinct in the wild. The few that remain are in the ponds of some temples in Assam.

- A similar homecoming of 11 hatchlings of the equally endangered Indian roofed turtle (Pangshura tecta) and the Indian tent turtle (Pangshura tentoria) was organised at the Hayagriv Madhab Temple in Hajo, Assam.

Do you know?

- Black Softshell Turtle: IUCN Extinct in wild
- Indian roofed turtle: IUCN Least Concern
- Indian tent turtle: IUCN Least Concern

IASBABA'S OPTIONAL
SUBJECT COURSES
OPTIONALS CLASSROOM PROGRAMME
GEOGRAPHY
SOCIOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY
POLITICAL SCIENCE
KANNADA LIT.
TLP OPTIONALS TEST SERIES
GEOGRAPHY
SOCIOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY
POLITICAL SCIENCE
PUBLIC ADMIN

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Making India energy robust

Introduction:

India faces a variety of challenges related to energy and environment. Below are some initiatives that the next government could contemplate early on its term.

Initiatives to make India energy robust:

On the policy front:

- **Integrating energy and environment policy**:
  This will help doing away with the current siloed approach to energy policy and enable the new government to view the sector through an integrated and holistic lens. It could more easily track and evaluate the systemic implications of changes in any one or more component variable.
- An "**Energy and Environment Security Act**" should be passed at the earliest possible opportunity.
  The objective of such an act should be to bring energy and environment into the national narrative; to set out the road map for managing and mitigating the emergent challenge of balancing economic development and energy demands with the goal of environmental protection; and, to mobilise public support for the policy and regulatory changes required to hasten the transition to a non-fossil fuel based energy system.
- Decarbonisation, demand management and efficiency should be the watchwords of the new government's energy policy.
  The focus should be on generating electricity from solar and wind, incentivising electric vehicles, curtailing diesel consumption in agriculture, enforcing standards and emission norms, redesigning buildings and factories to make them carbon neutral and influencing behavioural change towards energy conservation.
- The "clean energy fund" which is currently funded through a cess on coal production should be augmented through the issuance of "green bonds" and a clean energy tax. This is to intensify research and development on clean energy technologies (battery storage, carbon capture and sequestration, hydrogen, coal gasification, modular nuclear reactors, etc.) and to fund the transmission and distribution infrastructure required for absorbing the flow of clean energy.
- The fund is currently managed by the ministry of finance. It should be managed by those who have domain expertise.

- Energy data is scattered across various government departments. This hinders policy and investment.
  The new government should establish an **integrated energy data centre**, whose data should be regularly updated and made available to all players on commercial terms.

On International front:

Energy diplomacy:

The levers of energy and, in particular, oil policy, are today in the hands of autocratic leaders.

The local actions of leaders now have global, supply-related ramifications.

The new government should, therefore, look to develop a specialised cadre of "energy diplomats."

Unshackling the energy public sector units from intrusive bureaucratic oversight will enable their management to respond with agility to unexpected market developments.

Establishing strong personal relations with the leaders of oil exporting states.

Increasing domestic capabilities:

Intensifying exploration and enhancing recovery:

- The government should replace the current revenue-sharing model with a production-sharing model for new exploration.
- It should link investment in the marginal and smaller discovered fields with access to the domestic retail market.
- It should contemplate bidding out Mumbai High and other major producing oil and gas fields to international players with proven enhanced oil recovery technologies. The current recovery rates of production from these fields are well below the global average.

Increasing competition:

Coal India Limited (CIL) is a major producer of coal but faces huge legacy issues (labour unions, mafia, politics and organisation) which constrain its ability to fully and efficiently harness the country's indigenous coal reserves.

The new government can allow private sector companies into commercial coal mining. The consequent pressure of competition will bear positively on the performance of CIL.

Natural gas:

- Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) should be unbundled into a monopoly gas pipeline company. It should be divested of its upstream (production/ re-gassification of LNG) and downstream (petrochemicals) operations.

- The "common access" principle must be fairly enforced. Every player, private or public, must have equal access to gas pipelines.
- The price of gas should be determined on the basis of market and competitive principles.
- A gas trading hub should be expeditiously established.
- Special energy courts should be established to expedite adjudication of disputes and ensure sanctity of contracts.

Connecting the dots:

- India faces a variety of challenges related to energy and environment. In order to make India energy robust actions needs to be taken on policy front. Comment.

The 5G Wave

Introduction:

- 5G is the next generation of mobile standards being defined by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) – a specialized agency of the UN for information and communication technologies responsible for allocation of global radio spectrum and development of technical standards.
- Along with high data rate, 5G will also reduce latency, save energy, and enable massive device connectivity, paving the way for next-generation applications such as autonomous vehicles, smart homes and cities, and massive machine-to-machine communications for industries.
- It is estimated that the total economic impact from 5G in India can exceed $1 trillion by 2035.

Is India 5G Ready?

India, with the second largest mobile phone subscriber base globally, has also joined the race for 5G.

The delayed adoption of previous generations of mobile networks. The commercial launch of 3G services took place in Japan in 2001, but arrived in India only in December 2008. 4G roll-out in 2012 came three years after the first commercial launch in 2009.

- The telecom industry is under severe financial distress, with falling Average Revenue Per User (ARPU), declining revenues, mounting losses and increasing debt.

The import duty for equipment such as base stations, optical transport gear, 4G LTE products, gateway controllers, carrier Ethernet switches etc., has further been increased to 20 per cent.

- 5G deployment is a costly affair and debt-ridden telecom service providers have to work their finances out before they chart out plans for acquiring 5G spectrum or investing in equipment.
- One of the fundamental requirements for timely and effective 5G deployment is optical fibre based strong backhaul infrastructure. Optical fibre kilometres per capita in India is around one-tenth that in China and one-fifteenth of that in Japan.
- As mentioned in the National Digital Communications Policy 2018, the fibre-to-the-tower programme is supposed to enable at least 60 per cent of telecom towers thereby accelerating migration to 4G/5G. The government's flagship BharatNet programme also plans to link 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through optical fibre network. However, to achieve these targets a major change is necessary in existing construction and clearance processes.

High Level 5G India 2020 Forum:

It was set up in 2017 to evaluate and build a roadmap or action plan for 5G deployment in India by 2020. The report laid out three priority areas in 5G:

- **Deployment** – An early roll out of 5G services to maximise the value proposition of 5G as a technology.
- **Technology** – To build indigenous industrial and R&D capacity, especially for the design and Intellectual Property.
- **Manufacturing** – To expand the manufacturing base for 5G technologies, which includes both semiconductor fabrication and equipment assembly and testing.

Way ahead:

- Bringing the full benefits of 5G to the people and economy at the lowest cost and in the shortest time possible.

  It is in India's benefit to not exclude any players from the small set of 5G equipment vendors. It is to our advantage to keep competition high, telecom equipment pricing low, and access to the full range of technology options open.
- Minimise any security risks to critical telecom infrastructure. India can consider forming a techno-diplomatic alliance with countries at risk from the same telecom products and create an information sharing and competency building agreement with them — Russia, Japan, France, and Germany are some of the potential partner countries.

- Maximising India's opportunities for value creation from the global 5G revolution. India has limited intellectual property in 5G technologies and is largely going to be a buyer of this technology. However, the size of the Indian market and our strengths in services and software create some opportunities for symmetric dependencies and value creation.
- The government should encourage capacity building in Indian companies for "5G deployment services" such that Indian talent can be used across the world. Global deployments of 5G are expected to continue over the next decade and will require skilled labour to design, install, and monitor these networks.

Conclusion:

Telecom technology generations evolve in decade time-frames. It will take foresight and strong execution of a national plan to make India a relevant player in the next evolution of telecom technology.

If India plays this situation right and plays to win, we can not only bring timely and affordable 5G to India, but do it with due consideration to our security concerns and even get an upside from our engagement with the global 5G revolution.

Connecting the dots:

- India, with the second largest mobile phone subscriber base globally, has joined the ongoing race for 5G. Is India ready for the same? Discuss.

TRAI asked to revisit spectrum auction recommendations

Part of Prelims and mains GS II: Governance, GS III: Economics

In news

The Digital Communications Commission (DCC) — the highest decision-making body at the Department of Telecom, on Thursday asked the TRAI to reconsider its entire recommendation on the forthcoming spectrum auctions that includes reserve price and methodology, keeping in view the larger objective of Digital India. DCC seeks 5G for rural health and education.

Do you know?

About Digital Communications Commission

The 'National Digital Communications Policy-2018' re-designated the 'Telecom Commission' as the 'Digital Communications Commission' to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the National Digital Communications Policy-2018.

The Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Telecommunications is the ex-officio Chairman of the Digital Communications Commission.

The Digital Communications Commission is responsible for:

- Formulating the policy of Department of Telecommunications for approval of the Government;
- Preparing the budget for the Department of Telecommunications for each financial year and getting it approved by the Government;
- Implementation of Government's policy in all matters concerning telecommunication.

Kaleshwaram project inaugurated in Telangana

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS III Infrastructure

In news

- The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP), claimed to be the world's largest multi-stage and multi-purpose lift irrigation scheme, was inaugurated on June 21, 2019.
- It is meant to irrigate over 37 lakh acres of new and existing ayacuts and supply drinking water to Hyderabad and villages en route.

Do you Know?

- Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari River in Kaleshwaram, Telangana, India.
- This project starts at the confluence point of Pranahita River and Godavari River i.e, at Kaleshwaram village in Telangana.
- Pranahita river in itself is a confluence of various other smaller tributaries like Wardha, Penganga and Wainganga Rivers.

India's first solar cruise vessel to be rolled out soon

Part of: Prelims and mains GS III infrastructure, environment and pollution

In news:

- Kerala is gearing up for the launch of the country's premier solar-powered cruise boat by December 2019.
- The hybrid vessel will be powered by a motor that can source energy from solar panels, battery, and generator,
- Solar vessels do not create air and noise pollution. The double-deck, double-engine catamaran-type vessel adheres to norms specified by the Indian Registry of Shipping (IRS).
- The initiative comes from the State Water Transport Department (SWTD), whose solar ferry Aditya in the Vaikom-Thavanakadavu route has proved to be a success.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

New agency to develop space warfare weapon systems

Part of Prelims and mains GS III: Science and Technology

In news

- To enhance the capabilities of the armed forces to fight wars in space, the government has approved the setting up of a new agency which will develop sophisticated weapon systems and technologies.
- The Defence Space Research Agency (DSRO) has been entrusted with the task of creating space warfare weapon systems and technologies.
- The agency would be provided with a team of scientists which would be working in close coordination with the tri-services integrated Defence staff officers.
- It would be providing the research and development support to the Defence Space Agency (DSA) which comprises members of the three services.

Amitabh's Twitter data put on dark web

Part of Prelims: Science and Technology, Mains: GS Paper III– Science and Technology

https://cdn-images-1.medium.com/max/1313/1*QUq9UpyBl_Ro2XaKSbUpiw.jpeg

What is Dark Web?

- The dark web is the World Wide Web content that exists on darknets, overlay networks that use the Internet but require specific software, configurations, or authorization to access.
- The dark web forms a small part of the deep web, the part of the Web not indexed by web search engines, although sometimes the term deep web is mistakenly used to refer specifically to the dark web.

India will have its own space station, says ISRO chief Sivan

Part of Prelims and mains GS III: Science and Technology

In News

- India plans to have its own space station, and the modalities for it will be worked out after the first manned mission, Gaganyaan, scheduled for August 2022.
- The ISRO would also join the international space community for a manned mission to the moon and beyond.
- A Gaganyaan National Advisory Council has been created with members from different institutions and industries. Selection of two to three crew members would be done in six months. They would then undergo training for 1-1.5 years after that
- A GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle will be used to launch the Gaganyaan. Prior to that, two unmanned missions would be undertaken, one in December next year and the second, six months after that.
- The Gagayaan mission aims to send a two or three member crew to space for a period of seven days. The spacecraft would be placed in a low earth orbit of 300-400 km.

Do you know?

The only countries that have had space stations so far are the US, Russia, China and a consortium of nations that own the International Space Station (ISS).

Low Earth Orbit: Low earth orbits (LEO) are satellite systems used in telecommunication, which orbit between 400 and 1,000 miles above the earth's surface. They are used mainly for data communication such as email, video conferencing and paging. They move at extremely high speeds and are not fixed in space in relation to the earth.

Microgravity: Microgravity is when the pull of gravity is not very strong. In microgravity, it is easy to move heavy objects. The studies help show what happens to people and other things in

space. Microgravity does things to the human body. For example, muscles and bones can get weaker. Astronauts on the space station spend months in microgravity.

Libra is Facebook's cryptocurrency

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III technology

In news

- Facebook is leaping into the world of cryptocurrency with its own digital money, designed to let people save, send or spend money as easily as firing off text messages.
- 'Libra' — described as "a new global currency" — was unveiled on Tuesday in a new initiative in payments for the world's biggest social network with the potential to bring crypto-money out of the shadows and into the mainstream.
- The initiative has the potential to allow more than a billion "unbanked" people around the world access to online commerce and financial services

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Cancer cell detection 'dots' developed from coal

Part of Prelims and mains GS III Science and Technology

In news

- A team of scientists in Assam has developed a chemical process that turns 'dirty' coal into a biomedical 'dot' to help detect cancer cells.
- It is a chemical method of producing carbon quantum dots (CQDs) from cheap, abundant, low-quality and high-sulphur coals.
- CQDs are carbon-based nanomaterials whose size is less than 10 nm, or nanometre.
- Carbon-based nanomaterials are used as diagnostic tools for bio-imaging, especially in detecting cancer cells, for chemical sensing and in opto-electronics.
- CSIR-NEIST team developed fluorescent carbon nanomaterials at one-twentieth the cost of imported CQDs
- The CQDs that the CSIR-NEIST team developed emit a bluish colour with "high-stability, good-conductivity, low-toxicity, environmental friendliness, and good optical properties.
- CQDs are futuristic materials whose demand in India has been increasing leading to a considerable volume of import.

Scientists decode genome of 'miracle plant'

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Science and Technology

In news

- 'Arogyapacha' (Trichopus zeylanicus) is endemic to the Agastya hills, and is known for its medicinal properties.
- This 'miracle plant' is known for its traditional use by the Kani tribal community to combat fatigue.
- Studies have also proven its anti-oxidant, aphrodisiac, anti-microbial, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumour, anti-ulcer, hepatoprotective and anti-diabetic properties.

Do you know?

Kani is a tribe living in the Western Ghats area of Kerala, India. Their use of the forest plant arogyapacha (trichopus zeylanicus) as a key ingredient in a herbal remedy called Jeevani was noted by visiting scientists.

India as a space power

Introduction:

Space has undoubtedly become a military theatre. The US, Russia, China and, since March, India, have shown that they have the capability to physically destroy satellites in orbit. The post-Cold War space arms race is underway.

What does it mean to be a space power?

It is "the ability to use space while denying reliable use to any foe". India already has significant ability to use space. But our ability to deny its use to an adversary is, understandably, negligible.

The exceptional route India took:

The US, Russia, China and Europe developed space capabilities for military purposes first, and then put those technologies to civilian use.

India's space quest, on the other hand, was focused on civilian use—weather forecasting, broadcast, telecommunications and remote sensing. It was only in the mid-1980s that technology from the Indian Space Research Organisation's (Isro) Satellite Launch Vehicle-3 was employed in the Agni ballistic missile.

When it comes to satellites, India has a handful of military satellites in operation, compared to over 40 civilian ones. Our first dedicated military satellite was launched only in 2013.

Rethinking our approach:

Just like India was late to militarize space, it has been late to weaponize it. That's not a bad thing, but in the changed circumstances of the 21st century, it is time to rethink our approach. India's unstated space doctrine is to use space to promote development and the well-being and prosperity of its people. What we must do now is to include the word "security" in that sentence. In doing so, the policy goal will change from having a space presence to being a space power.

Way ahead:

- India must protect and secure two kinds of space assets—those that belong to us and those that are crucial to our economy and national security. Future designs of satellites must certainly factor in the risk of attack by hostile forces.
- In order to effectively defend our space assets, India must have the most reliable and accurate capabilities to track space objects, from debris and spacecraft to celestial bodies. This crucial capability must be developed indigenously.
- For space defence to be effective, India must acquire a minimum, credible offensive capacity across the various types of space weapons, physical, electronic and cyber.
- Our broader space policy must acquire a new seriousness in improving launch capabilities and spacecraft design. The ability to place large satellites in geostationary orbits should become highly reliable. ISRO's budgets must be enlarged. Also, private entrants must be encouraged in everything from launches to specialized payloads.

Conclusion:

The government's decision to set up a Defence Space Agency (DSA) with command over the space assets of the Army, Navy and Air Force is the most significant development in India's defence establishment since the operationalization of the nuclear arsenal around 15 years ago. It is time the DSA starts working on the path of making India a space power.

Connecting the dots:

- Space has undoubtedly become a military theatre. India's policy goal should change from having a space presence to being a space power. Discuss.

75 student satellites may fly to space as India turns 75

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Space research

In news

Up to 75 tiny satellites built by students of Indian universities could fly to the skies between late next year and 2022 in batches.

Seventy-five by 75:

- This is the dream project that the Indian Technology Congress Association (ITCA) has conceived to celebrate the nation's 75th birthday. That is also to be the year of Gaganyaan, the first trip of Indian astronauts to space.
- Students of participating institutions would come from different disciplines and get to build nano satellites weighing between 3 and 12 kg. They may demonstrate a novel concept, science experiment, or technology in orbit.
- The ITCA, a technology promotion body based in Bengaluru, has roped in around 40 engineering colleges to form a consortium. It is also in the midst of discussing launch contracts with the Indian Space Research Organisation and working out Israeli finance for its '75 Student Satellites Mission 2022'.

Significance

- For the colleges, it can mean a branding exercise and a permanent ground infrastructure on their premises.
- For the students, an out-of-the-world learning experience, exposure to an elite job market, and a chance to turn entrepreneurs who can attract space majors, with frugal satellite services.
- Space-based solutions reach people in remote areas where many other technologies do not reach or work.
- Students can learn to design small satellites that can offer simple, meaningful, and low-cost solutions to soldiers, farmers, boatsmen, forest personnel, or students.
- ISRO wants to offload satellite assembly to the private sector.
- In the last three to five years, other countries launched about 3,500 student satellites that demonstrated innovative technologies; another 2,500 could be in the offing.
- Indian universities have so far built and launched only nine satellites of fleeting lifespans.

National mission on natural language translation soon

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Science and Tech

In news

The Ministry of Electronics and IT will soon place before the Union Cabinet a proposal for Natural Language Translation — one of the key missions identified by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

The national mission on natural language translation

- The national mission on natural language translation aims to make science and technology accessible to all by facilitating access to teaching and researching material bilingually — in English and in one's native Indian language.
- To achieve this, the government plans to leverage a combination of machine translation and human translation.
- The IT ministry is the lead agency for implementation of the mission along with Ministry of Human Resource Development and Department of Science and Technology.

Significance

- Translation activities can also help generate employment for educated unemployed.
- The mission would help not just students who find it difficult to access knowledge because of language barrier, but also teachers, authors, publishers, translation software developers and general readers.

PM-STIAC

The PM- STIAC is an overarching body that identifies challenges in certain areas of science and technology.

NASA to send a drone to Saturn's largest moon

Part of Prelims and Mains GS III Science and Tech

In news

For its next mission in our solar system, NASA plans to fly a drone copter to Saturn's largest moon Titan in search of the building blocks of life.

The Dragonfly mission

- The Dragonfly mission, which will launch in 2026 and land in 2034, will send a rotorcraft to fly to dozens of locations across the icy moon, which has a substantial atmosphere and is viewed by scientists as an equivalent of very early-era earth.
- It is the only celestial body besides our planet known to have liquid rivers, lakes and seas on its surface, though these contain hydrocarbons like methane and ethane, not water.
- NASA said the vehicle would have eight rotors and fly like a large drone.
- During its 2.7-year baseline mission, Dragonfly will explore diverse environments from organic dunes to the floor of an impact crater where liquid water and complex organic materials key to life once existed together for possibly tens of thousands of years.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Funding Disaster Management

Background:

Cyclone Fani wreaked havoc in Odisha in May last year. In the current year, more than 10 states have faced drought conditions. Natural disasters are increasingly affecting large parts of the country.

The impact of these is asymmetric as the poor suffer more. Effective management of disasters is not only required for preserving growth, but equally for addressing poverty and reducing inequality. The sine qua non for effective disaster management is adequate funding.

Three stages in disaster management:

- Disaster mitigation—taking long-term steps such as putting in place early warning systems and rainwater harvesting structures to reduce the impact of disasters.
- Disaster relief—affected persons are provided assistance and essential services are restored.
- Disaster reconstruction—damaged infrastructure is rebuilt.

The Disaster Management Act, 2005, requires that a disaster management plan and a mitigation plan be formulated at the district, state and national levels. Each is to be supported at every level by disaster relief and mitigation funds that must be set up.

Thus, six plans and six funds are required to be created to manage disasters in India.

Issue:

Disaster management plans have been formulated. The National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Relief Funds (SDRF) have been set up. However, mitigation plans have not been prepared at any level. Also, the corresponding funds have not been set up. When disasters occur, states are driven to unorthodox sources of funding for following reasons.

- The NDRF through which the centre assists states when they face severe calamities is available only for disaster relief and not for mitigation or restoration. A similar provision applies to the SDRF.

  States must meet outlays for disaster mitigation and restoration, which are as important as relief, on their own.
- State governments underestimate the probability of adverse events occurring. They do not make adequate provision in their budgets for mitigation and reconstruction.

- The borrowing capacity of states is constrained under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

Unorthodox measures adopted by states:

- The Kerala government levies a cess of 1% on its SGST for up to two years after approval from GST council. Such a cess will not be eligible for input tax credit and militates against the very idea of GST. Further, other states may make similar requests. No longer will it be “one tax for one nation". This option is thus not sustainable.
- Kerala issued rupee-denominated bonds overseas (masala bonds). Such an instrument of debt infringes Article 293(1) of the Constitution, which prohibits state governments from borrowing outside the territory of India.

Way ahead:

States facing calamities of rare severity should receive additional assistance. Such assistance should be drawn from a strengthened NDRF, which is financed by the National Calamity Contingency Duty (NCCD), the proceeds of which have fallen sharply after the introduction of GST. As its own resources are limited, the centre may consider expanding the tax base of the NCCD. This is a sustainable option to fund disaster management nationally. It will enable the creation of a national disaster mitigation fund as envisaged and required.
In parallel, India’s states should set up state disaster mitigation funds on their own.

Connecting the dots:

- When disasters occur, states are driven to unorthodox sources of funding. In this light highlight the importance of funding disaster management.

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

Defence Preparedness in India

Background:

With the Modi Government returning to power, expectations of deeper and far-reaching reforms are high across various ministries and departments. The Ministry of Defence (MoD), which has already undertaken a plethora of reforms during the last five years, is expected to walk along the reform path and build on previous initiatives to further strengthen defence preparedness and build a credible defence industrial base.

Defence Planning:

In April 2018 the **Defence Planning Committee (DPC)** was set up under the chairmanship of the National Security Advisor (NSA).

The purpose of the powerful DPC is to facilitate comprehensive and integrated defence planning. Its mandate is to articulate a national security strategy, develop a holistic defence plan, keeping in view the critical requirements of the armed forces as well as resource constraints.

Defence Budget:

A very large portion of the defence budget is earmarked for manpower costs, which has also witnessed a hefty rise after the implementation of the recommendations of the Seventh Central Pay Commission (CPC) and the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme.

As a result, the capital procurement budget, which is critical for defence modernisation, has seen a marked fall in its share in the budget.

Defence Acquisition:

The present Defence Procurement Management System and the Defence Procurement Procedures (DPP), have come a long way since their creation in 2001. The established structures and procedures have streamlined many aspects of acquisition through the periodic revision of the DPP.

Issues:

- In performance audit report of 2019, the CAG has pointed out that the existing organisation has “resulted in diffused accountability” as it involves numerous agencies that are accountable to different administrative heads.

- The auditor has also pointed out the lack of objectivity and fair play in technical evaluation.
- The acquisition machinery also suffers from lack of professional expertise to undertake the assigned tasks.

Make in India in Defence:

Under the Make in India initiative, the government has already taken a large number of initiatives to promote indigenous defence manufacturing.

- These include a streamlined industrial licensing process; a hike in the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap from 26 to 100 per cent; a level-playing field for the private sector vis-à-vis public sector entities in payment and tax matters and a new procurement category to enable domestic industry to focus on indigenous design and higher level of indigenisation.
- The MoD has also announced an ambitious defence production policy that aims at arms production; launched two defence industrial corridors; identified a number items in which local suppliers would enjoy purchase preference; and announced a number of initiatives to support start-ups and innovation.

The MOD should now build on the initiatives already taken to further strengthen India' defence manufacturing base.

Way forward:

- The Defence Planning Committee (DPC) should articulate the national security strategy and a set of holistic capability, R&D and manufacturing plan documents.
- Rationalising the current manpower-driven defence expenditure. To provide greater momentum to the modernisation of the armed forces, there is a need to enhance defence spending.
- The MoD should explore the option of generating revenues by putting to commercial use the unused and underused defence land.
- Making the acquisition apparatus more accountable and professional.
- Strengthening the defence manufacturing base to meet the requirements of the armed forces.

Conclusion:

Given its volatile security environment and the changing character of warfare, India cannot afford to lower its military guard. The last five years have witnessed an unprecedented number of reforms to enhance defence preparedness and equip the armed forces with indigenously sourced arms. These reforms need to be deepened so as to meet India's security threats effectively and through arms made in India.

Connecting the dots:

- Major reforms have been taken by the government in recent times to strengthen India's defence preparedness. Its time these reforms are deepened to meet India's security threats effectively. Comment.

DRDO conducts maiden test of hypersonic technology demonstrator

Part of Prelims and mains GS III; Security

In News

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted the maiden test of an indigenously developed Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) along with several technologies
- Under this project, DRDO is developing a hypersonic vehicle that will be powered by a scram-jet engine.
- This is dual-use technology, which when developed, will have multiple civilian applications. It can be used for launching satellites at low cost. It will also be available for long-range cruise missiles of the future,
- In scram-jet technology, combustion of fuel takes place in a chamber in the missile at supersonic speeds.
- This is different from a ram jet system where the system collects the air it needs from the atmosphere during the flight at subsonic speeds and the propellants burn in the combustion chamber.

Navy to build 6 submarines

Part of Prelims and mains GS III Defence and security

In news:

- The Navy issued an 'Expression of Interest' for shortlisting potential strategic partners for the construction of six P-75 (I) submarines.
- This is the second project being undertaken under the latest Strategic Partnership (SP) Model, with the first being the procurement of 111 naval utility helicopters (NUH)

- This will provide a major boost to the indigenous design and construction capability of submarines in India, in addition to bringing in the latest submarine design and technologies as part of the project.
- The SPs have been mandated to set up dedicated manufacturing lines for these submarines in India with an aim to make India the global hub for submarine design and production.

Do you know?

Strategic Partnership (SP) Model

Strategic Partnership Model aims to revitalise defence industrial ecosystem and progressively build indigenous capabilities in the private sector to design, develop and manufacture complex weapon systems for the future needs of the Armed Forces.

It lays emphasis on incentivisation of transfer of niche technology and higher indigenous content Global Majors, who in collaboration with Indian Partners are ready to make India a Regional / Global manufacturing hub for the platform will also be incentivized.

This will give a major fillip towards encouraging self-reliance and aligning the defence sector with the 'Make in India ' initiative of the Government.

Police station in Satara tops SMART police survey

Part of Prelims and Mains GS II Polity and governance

In news

- Recently the Quality council of India, executed a survey based on the SMART police concept.
- In the survey , the Kalu police station in Rajasthan's Bikaner topped the survey followed by PS in Andaman and West Bengal.
- The survey was commissioned by Union Home Ministry and was executed by the Quality council of India.

Do you know?

About SMART Police

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 called for making the police a 'SMART' force — Strict and Sensitive, Modern and Mobile, Alert and Accountable, Reliable and Responsive, Techno savvy and Trained.

About QCI

Quality Council of India (QCI) was set up in 1997 by Government of India jointly with Indian Industry as an autonomous body under the administrative control of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Indian industry is represented in QCI by three premier industry associations namely ASSOCHAM; CII; and FICCI.

PERSON IN NEWS

Person in news	Description
1. Virendra Kumar	**Why in news?** • Virendra Kumar will be the Pro-tem Speaker of the Lok Sabha. • As Pro-tem Speaker, he will preside over the first sitting of the Lok Sabha, administer the oath of office to the newly elected MPs, and oversee the election of the Speaker. **Do you know?** • After a general election and the formation of a new government, a list of senior Lok Sabha members prepared by the Legislative Section is submitted to the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, who selects a pro tem speaker. The appointment has to be approved by the President. • The first meeting after the election when the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are selected by members of the Parliament is held under the pro tem Speaker.
2.	

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Mula Mutha River	₹990-crore river cleaning project, a 'gift from the Centre', has been fast-tracked.
2. Formalin	It is used to preserve fish and is harmful to human and ecosystem health.
3. Mission Kakatiya and Mission Bhagiratha	NITI Aayog had recommended special assistance of ₹19,205 crore to Mission Bhagiratha, intended to supply piped drinking water to every household, and ₹5,000 crore to Mission Kakatiya, meant to restore over 45,000 tanks in the State.
4. Mission Bhagiratha	It is a project for safe drinking water for every village and city household in Telangana State.
5. Mission Kakatiya	It is a programme for restoring all the minor irrigation tanks and lakes in Telangana State.

6.	

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1) Which of the following cities is/are located on Mula Mutha River?

1. Mumbai
2. Pune
3. Nagpur

Select the correct statements

a) 1 and 2
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 3
d) 1, 2, and 3

Q.2) Recently "Formalin" has been in news. It is,

a) Harmful chemical used to preserve fish
b) Antibiotic used for marine health
c) Second line drug for drug resistant TB
d) None of the above

Q.3) Consider the following statements about BT Cotton,

1. There are three types of BT cotton in India namely, BG I Cotton, BG II Cotton, BG III Cotton.
2. All the three varieties are allowed to cultivate in general in India.

Select the correct statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.4) Consider the following statements

1. The Securities and Exchange Board of India is a non statutory regulator of Securities market in India.
2. Insider trading is a punishable offence under SEBI Act.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.5) Consider the following statements,

1. First session of Lok Sabha, after general elections, is presided by President.
2. Speaker protem delivers oath to newly elected MPs in Lok Sabha.

Select the correct statements

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6) Consider the following countries :

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. China
4. India
5. Japan
6. USA

Which of the above are among the 'free-trade partners' of ASEAN ?

a) 1, 2, 4 and 5
b) 3, 4, 5 and 6
c) 1, 3, 4 and 5
d) 2, 3, 4 and 6

Q.7) Consider the following countries :

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. China
4. India
5. Japan
6. USA

Which of the above are not members of the proposed Quad?

a) 1, 4, 5 and 6
b) 3, 4, 5 and 6
c) 2 and 3
d) All of the above are members

Q.8) Which of the following panel has been set up to review the economic capital framework (ECF) for the Reserve Bank?

a) Urjit Patel Panel
b) Lodha Panel
c) Bimal Jalan Panel
d) None of the above

Q.9) In Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which of the following sectors have highest share?

a) Electricity
b) Manufacturing
c) Services
d) Mining

Q.10) Consider the following statements,

1. CPI is calculated by CSO with base year 2010-11
2. IIP is calculated by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) with base year 2011-12.

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.11) Bishkek was recently in news. It is

a) A tribe residing in central Asia
b) Capital city of Kyrgyzstan
c) Desert in Russia
d) None of the above

Q.12) Consider the following countries :

1. India
2. Pakistan
3. Afghanistan
4. Tajikistan

Which of the above are not members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?

a) 1, 2 and 4
b) 1 and 2
c) 3 and 4
d) 3 only

Q.13) Bishkek Declaration recently seen in news is related to

a) BRICS
b) SAARC
c) SCO
d) None of the above

Q.14) Consider the following statements regarding RATS

1. The Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) was established in the year 2004 at the Astana Summit.
2. SCO-RATS is a permanent body established to bring about coordination and interaction between member states in ensuring security in the region.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.15) Consider the following statements

1. Only US provides duty free imports under Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).
2. In Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), both the signing countries allow duty free imports to each other.

Select the correct statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.16) The Ugratara Temple of Assam was recently in news because of,

a) Its unique tradition of turtle conservation
b) Due to its practice Devdasi tradition
c) It is exclusively for men. Women of particular age are barred to enter.
d) None of the above

Q.17) Consider the following statements

1. Mangdechhu Hydropwer project in Bhutan is being constructed with the help of China.
2. Bhutan agreed to be part of BBIN motor vehicle agreement.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.18) As per IUCN, which of the following are extinct in wild.

a) Indian tent turtle
b) Black Softshell Turtle
c) Indian roofed turtle
d) All of the above

Q.19) the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is,

a) For international trade in genetically modifies agro based products.
b) For elimination of conflict diamonds from international trade.
c) Certification uranium enrichment for civil use
d) None of the above

Q.20) Consider the following statements

1. Global Peace Index 2019 is Published by Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).
2. It ranks countries and regions on three broad based themes: Extent of conflict, Safety and Security, and Level of militarization.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a) Only 1

b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.21) The Bonn Challenge recently seen in news is related to,

a) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
b) The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
c) The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
d) All of the above

Q.22) Libra recently seen in news is

a. A rising in France against government.
b. Cryptocurrency
c. US secret operation against Iran
d. None of the above

Q.23) Consider the following statements

1. Only 30% of the India's waste water is treated at plants providing at least secondary treatment, in comparison to an 80% global average.
2. In rural India, only 32% of the population have access to piped water, less than half of the 68% who have access in urban India.

Select the *correct* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
a. Both 1 and 2
b. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24) World Population Prospects report is published by

a. United Nations
b. World Health organization
c. World Economic Forum
d. None of the above

Q.25) India has opened its first specialised hydrotherapy treatment for elephants

a) Mathura
b) Agra
c) Banaras
d) None of the above

Q.26) Consider the following statements

1. Carbon quantum dots (CQDs)are carbon-based nanomaterials whose size is less than 10 nm, or nanometre.
2. CQDs can be used to detect and treat cancer cells in human bodies.

Select the *correct* statements

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.27) Sashakt Committee recently seen in news is related to

a) Defence
b) Health
c) Banking
d) None of the above

Q.28) Consider the following,

1. Mission Bhagiratha
2. Mission Kakatiya
3. Polavaram Project
4. Kaleswaram Lift Irrigation Project

Which of the above are associated with State of Telangana?

a. 1 and 2 only
b. 1,2 and 3 only
a. 1,2 and 4 only
b. All of the above

Q.29) Consider the following statements

1. The Financial Action Task Force(FATF)is an intergovernmental organization founded on the initiative of the G20.
2. Pakitan, Iran and North Korea are three countries in the Blacklist of FATF.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.30) 'Access, Watch and Reserve' policy recently seen in news is related to,

a. Conservation of petroleum reserves
b. Conservation of natural resources
a. Policy to avoid unnecessary use of antibiotics
b. None of the above

Q.31) Consider the following statements about Strait of Homruz

1. Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran and Yemen.
2. About a third of the world's seaborne oil exits the Gulf via Strait of Hormuz.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.32) Consider the following statements about Strait of Homruz

1. Strategic Partnership Model will help in aligning the defence sector with the 'Make in India ' initiative of the Government.
2. Strategic Partnership Model lays emphasis on incentivisation of transfer of niche technology and higher indigenous content from Indian partner to foreign partner.

Select the correct statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.33) Which of the following is correct about 'Jeevani'

a. It is a health program of Akashvani
b. It is a herbal remedy
a. Health assistance program of Odisha
b. None of the above

Q.34) Consider the following statements

1. 'Arogyapacha' is endemic to the Agastya hills, and is known for its medicinal properties.
2. 'Arogyapacha' is known for its traditional use by the Kani tribal community to combat fatigue.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2

c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.35) Consider the following statements about Ambubachi Mela,

1. It is an annual Buddhist mela celebrated during the monsoon season.
2. It is the celebration of the yearly menstruation course of goddess Mother Shakti.

Select the correct statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.36) SDG 3 is related to

a. Health
b. Education
a. Sanitation
b. None of the above

Q.37) Consider the following statements

1. The Peace to Prosperity economic workshop held in Bahrain under the leadership of US.
2. Palestine agreed to accept the peace plan to be drawn at the workshop.

Select the *Correct* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.38) "Healthy States progressive India" report is published by

a. Ministry of Health and Family welfare
b. Ministry of women and child development
a. NITI Ayog
b. None of the above

Q.39) "Impressed" tortoise recently first recorded in India in state of,

a. Assam
b. Arunachal Pardesh
c. Odisha
d. Karnataka

Q.40) Project "Seventy-five by 75" is related to

a. Health
b. Defence
a. Space
b. None of the above

Q.41) Consider the following statements

1. In India, Water is a State subject.
2. Jal Shakti Abhiyan will be coordinated by central IAS officers drawn from ministries as varied as Space, Petroleum and Defence, etc.

Select the *incorrect* statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42) The national mission on natural language translation will be implemented by,

a. Department of Science and Technology
b. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
a. Ministry of Human Resource Development
b. All of the above

Q.43) Consider the following statements

1. Recently the Quality council of India, executed a survey based on the SMART police concept.
2. Quality Council of India (QCI) was set up by Government of India jointly with Indian Industry as an autonomous body.

Select the Correct statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.44) The Dragonfly mission is related to,

a. Saturn
b. Mars
a. Saturn's Moon: Titan
b. None of the above

Q.45) Consider the following statements about SHE Team

1. SHE stands for 'Safety, Health and Environment'.
2. 'SHE Team' will try to prevent harassment of working women at workplaces and public places only.

Select the Correct statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q.46) Consider the following statements regarding state of Jammu and Kashmir,

1. Governor's Rule and President's Rule are one and the same.
2. Once President's rule is imposed, lawmaking power is transferred to the parliament.

Select the Correct statements

a. Only 1
b. Only 2
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

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1	b	13	c	25	a	37	a
2	a	14	a	26	a	38	c
3	a	15	a	27	c	39	b
4	a	16	a	28	c	40	c
5	b	17	c	29	d	41	d
6	c	18	b	30	c	42	d
7	c	19	b	31	a	43	c
8	c	20	d	32	a	44	c
9	b	21	c	33	b	45	a
10	d	22	b	34	d	46	b
11	b	23	c	35	b		
12	d	24	a	36	a		

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- The classes will be taken by Dr. Vamshi Krishna Sir (a Topper himself in Sociology in UPSC 2014, 2015), BDS, M.A (Sociology)
  Working as Assistant Administrative officer at CSIR NAL.
  Associated with IASBABA since its inception. He has a teaching experience of 5 Years.
- Dr.Vamshi writes on social issues on blogs. Regular contributor to Research gate and Academia.edu on social issues useful for researchers and social scientists.

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