

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT**Mahila Police Volunteers**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs has envisaged engagement of Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) in the States and Union Territories who will act as a link between police and community and help women in distress. All Chief Secretaries of States/UTs have been requested to adopt this initiative in their respective States.

About the scheme:

- Originally conceived by the Union Ministry of Women & Child Development, Mahila Police Volunteer is a joint initiative with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Mahila Police Volunteers scheme envisages creation of a link between the police authorities and the local communities in villages through police volunteers who will be women specially trained for this purpose.
- Their primary job will be to keep an eye on situations where women in the village are harassed or their rights and entitlements are denied or their development is prevented.
- In order to provide a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress, one Mahila Police Volunteer (MPV) is envisaged per Gram Panchayat across the country. MPV must be at least 21 years old and class 12th. These will be selected through a laid out procedure from among the empowered, responsible, socially aware women who will facilitate police outreach on gender concerns.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Space Activities Bill, 2017**

The government is likely to introduce the Space Activities Bill, 2017, which will allow commercial use of space, in the budget session of 2019.

Features of Space activities bill 2017:

- It is a proposed Bill to promote and regulate the space activities of India.
- The new Bill encourages the participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.
- The provisions of this Act shall apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India.
- A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity.
- The Central Government will formulate the appropriate mechanism for licensing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
- The government will maintain a register of all space objects (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country.
- It will provide professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity.
- It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity.
- It will share details about the pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than Rs.1 crore or both.

Need for a legislation on outer space: There is a need for national space legislation for supporting the overall growth of the space activities in India. This would encourage enhanced participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India, in compliance with international treaty obligations, which is becoming very relevant today.

Rajasthan government scraps minimum education criteria for civic poll candidates

Rajasthan government has approved to do away with the minimum education qualification required to contest panchayat and urban bodies' elections. Earlier, the education criteria was introduced by the previous government, which stipulated that for contesting the zila parishad or

panchayat samiti polls, a contestant must have a minimum qualification of secondary education (Class X) and to contest the sarpanch elections, an aspirant from the general category must have passed Class VIII and a SC/ST aspirant must have passed Class V.

This is now scrapped because few experts are of the opinion that the requirement of minimum qualification for contesting elections is against the very spirit of 73rd and 74th amendments. And it also violates the right of every citizen to vote and to contest elections, which form the basic structure of the constitution.

The Supreme court hearing:

Even Haryana had passed a similar law mandating minimum education qualification for those contesting in Panchayat Raj Institutions. The constitutional validity of this law of Haryana was questioned in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court had upheld the constitutional validity of the law enacted by Haryana government to bar the illiterate from contesting panchayat polls in the state. The Supreme Court had ruled that "it is only education which gives a human being the power to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad".

The Supreme Court's interpretation is based on the fact that uneducated or illiterate people getting elected to the local bodies can easily be misled by officials if they don't know to write and read. In such cases, administrative actions that they are going can pose many challenges. The Court has further observed that it is only the education which can give people the power to differentiate between right and wrong, and good and bad.

Centre extends AFSPA in Nagaland

Recently, the entire State of Nagaland has been declared 'disturbed area' for six more months, till June 2019, under the controversial AFSPA. AFSPA empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice. Article 355 of the Constitution of India confers power to the Central Government to protect every state from internal disturbance.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act

- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA), are Acts of the Parliament of India that grant special powers to the Indian Armed Forces in which each act terms "disturbed areas".
- According to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976 once declared 'disturbed', the area has to maintain the status quo for a minimum of 3 months.
- One such Act passed on September 11, 1958, was applicable to the Naga Hills, then part of Assam.
- In the following decades it spread, one by one, to the other Seven Sister States in India's northeast (at present it is in force in Assam, Nagaland,
- Manipur excluding Imphal municipal council area, Changlang, Longding, and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh).
- Another one passed in 1983 and applicable to Punjab and Chandigarh was withdrawn in 1997, roughly 14 years after it came to force.

GOVERNANCE- SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC

Ujjwala Sanitary Napkin initiative in Odisha

The oil marketing companies have launched Ujjwala Sanitary Napkin Initiative, as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Odisha. This initiative in Odisha is being seen as an attempt to counter the 'Khushi' scheme launched by the Odisha State government. Under this Initiative:

- Around 100 local manufacturing units will be set up by oil marketing companies at Common Service Centres (CSCs) across 93 blocks in all 30 districts of Odisha.
- Each facility will have the capacity to produce 1200-2000 pads each day.
- Each facility will also have a sterilization room to ensure that the napkins are sterilized before they are packed for use of rural women.
- The companies will provide machineries and raw material for one time. Then the women will manage it and earn by selling the pads.
- The women will also be provided with proper training in the manufacturing and sale of sanitary napkins and the Ujjwala beneficiaries will also be provided with the job.

Khushi Scheme:

- As part of its initiatives to empower women, the Odisha government, last year, launched this scheme to provide free sanitary napkins to school girls across the state.
- The scheme will be implemented by the health and family welfare department of the state at a cost of 70 crore per year.
- Under this scheme, the Health Department of Odisha Government aims to provide free sanitary pads to 1.7 million girl students from grade 6th to 12th in government and government-aided schools. Also, it aims to promote health and hygiene among school going girls and higher retention of girls in school.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Establishing Gas Trading Hub/Exchange in the country**

It has been agreed to establish the gas trading hub(s)/exchange(s) in the country wherein the natural gas can be freely traded and supplied through a market mechanism.

Development of Natural Gas Grid:

To develop the natural gas grid, Government has taken a decision to provide a capital grant of Rs. 5176 crore (i.e. 40% of the estimated capital cost of Rs. 12,940 Crore) to GAIL for development of a 2655 Km long Jaddishpur-Haldia/Bokaro-Dhamra Gas Pipeline (JHBDPL) project. This pipeline will transport Natural Gas to the industrial, commercial, domestic and transport sectors in the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

An Integrated Refinery-cum-Petrochemical Complex: Oil Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) namely Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) have decided to set up an integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex with a refining capacity of 60 MMTPA (Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum) at Babulwadi, Taluka Rajapur in Ratnagiri District in the state of Maharashtra.

Minimum Support Prices (MSPs)

The Union government has declared inclusion of 17 new minor forest produce (MFP) under the government's minimum support price scheme. The new MFP under the scheme includes Mahua flowers (dried), Tejpatta (dried) and Kokum (dry).

The Pricing Cell, constituted by the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd (TRIFED), recommended inclusion of new MFPs under the scheme, given their importance to the economy of local communities.

Significance:

- A Planning Commission report had noted that MFP contributes to 20 to 40 per cent of the income of forest-dependent communities, especially the landless with a dominant population of tribals, and "provides critical subsistence during lean seasons."
- The MFP economy, however, is also known to suffer from unorganised and uncertain market demands, affecting economic returns to these communities.

MSP: In theory, an MSP is the minimum price set by the Government at which farmers can expect to sell their produce for the season. When market prices fall below the announced MSPs, procurement agencies step in to procure the crop and 'support' the prices.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**New study on REDD+**

A new study by Delhi-based non-profit Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has revealed that Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), the programme initiated by the United Nations in 2005 to mitigate climate change through enhanced forest management in developing countries, has largely failed to achieve its objectives.

Highlights of the study:

- Large-scale finance for REDD+ has been a major issue as carbon markets have not materialised and international funding commitments for REDD+ have been much lower than expected.
- "REDD+ implementation costs have been high and benefits for local communities from REDD+ projects have been minimal.

- There is need to rethink the REDD+ mechanism based on these experiences and the findings emerging from new research on the potential of forests to mitigate climate change.

India's REDD+ strategy:

- Complying with the UNFCCC decisions on REDD+, India has prepared its National REDD+ Strategy. The Strategy builds upon existing national circumstances which have been updated in line with India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, Green India Mission and India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to UNFCCC.
- The strategy report has been prepared by Indian Council of Forestry Research & Education (ICFRE), Dehradun.

About REDD+:

- REDD+ means "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation", conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.
- REDD+ is a mechanism developed by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- It creates a financial value for the carbon stored in forests by offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.
- Developing countries would receive results-based payments for results-based actions. REDD+ goes beyond simply deforestation and forest degradation and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

NASA's OSIRIS-Rex

NASA's OSIRIS-Rex spacecraft has set a new milestone in cosmic exploration by entering orbit around an asteroid, Bennu, the smallest object ever to be circled by a human-made spaceship. OSIRIS-Rex is the first-ever US mission designed to visit an asteroid and return a sample of its dust back to Earth. The \$800 million (roughly Rs. 5,600 crores) unmanned spaceship launched two years ago from Cape Canaveral, Florida and arrived December 3 at its destination, some 70 million miles (110 million kilometres) away.

OSIRIS-Rex stands for Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer.

OSIRIS-REx is the third mission in NASA's New Frontiers program, which previously sent the New Horizons spacecraft zooming by Pluto and the Juno spacecraft into orbit around Jupiter.

Why Bennu Asteroid: Bennu was selected for a the OSIRIS-REx mission from over 500,000 known asteroids, due to it fitting a number of key criteria. These include:

- Proximity to Earth: In order for OSIRIS-REx to reach its destination in a reasonable timeframe, NASA needed to find an asteroid which had a similar orbit to Earth.
- Size: Small asteroids, those less than 200m in diameter, typically spin much faster than larger asteroids, meaning the regolith material can be ejected into space. Bennu is around 500m in diameter, so rotates slowly enough to ensure that the regolith stays on its surface.
- Composition: Bennu is a primitive asteroid, meaning it hasn't significantly changed since the beginning of the Solar System (over 4 billion years ago). It is also very carbon-rich, meaning it may contain organic molecules, which could have been precursors to life on Earth.
- Additionally, Bennu is of interest as it is a Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA). Every 6 years, Bennu's orbit brings it within 200,000 miles of the Earth, which means it has a high probability of impacting Earth in the late 22nd Century.