NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC

Bharatmala Pariyojana

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) plans to raise Rs10,000 crore through Bharatmala Taxable Bonds in the ongoing financial year. As per the internal and extra budgetary resources approved for 2018-19 by the government, a sum of Rs62,000 crore is to be raised by NHAI through various instruments/sources including Bharatmala bonds.

Bharatmala project: Bharatmala Project is the second largest highways construction project in the country since NHDP, under which almost 50,000 km or highway roads were targeted across the country. Bharatmala will look to improve connectivity particularly on economic corridors, border areas and far flung areas with an aim of quicker movement of cargo and boosting exports.

NHAI: The National Highways Authority of India was constituted by an act of Parliament, the National Highways Authority of India Act,1988. It is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of National Highways entrusted to it and for matters connected or incidental thereto. The Authority was operationalised in Feb, 1995.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY

ASI declares new monuments as Monuments of National Importance

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recently declared that it has added six structures to the list of monuments of national importance, taking the total number to 3,693. With 506 monuments under its belt, Karnataka continues to top the list in South India, followed by Tamil Nadu (413). Nationally too, Karnataka is in the second place after Uttar Pradesh, which has 745 such monuments.

The six monuments declared as Monuments of national importance in 2018 are:

- Old High Court Building in Nagpur, Maharashtra.
- Haveli of Agha Khan in Agra.
- Haveli of Hathi Khana in Agra.
- Neemrana Baori in Rajasthan's Alwar district.
- Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail in Odisha's Bolangir district.
- Vishnu Temple in Kotali, Pithoragarh district, Uttarkhand.

Ancient Monument: According to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, any structure, sculpture, inscription, etc., which is in existence for not less than 100 years is termed ancient.

Makaravilakku festival season:

The hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Kerala has been opened for the 21 day-long Makaravilakku festival season, marking the concluding phase of the annual pilgrimage season.

Makaravilakku festival season: Makaravilakku is an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, at the shrine of Sabarimala. The festival includes the Thiruvabharanam (sacred ornaments of Ayyappan) procession and a congregation at the hill shrine of Sabarimala.

Anindita Neogy Anaam honoured with National Nritya Shiromani award

Kathak exponent Anindita Neogy Anaam has been honoured with the prestigious National Nritya Shiromani Award for her contribution towards preserving and promoting the dance form across the world. The award was conferred during the 10th Cuttack Mahotsav: International Dance and Music festival.

Cuttack Mahotsav: International Dance and Music Festival The Cuttack Mahotsav is an International Dance and Music festival organised by Utkal Yuva Sanskrutik Sangh, in collaboration with the state government's department of Odia language.

Anindita Neogy Anaam: US-based Kathak exponent Anindita Neogy Anaam has been trained under Pandit Rajendra Gangani and Pandit Jaikishan Maharaj. She has acquainted herself with both Jaipur and Lucknow Gharana of the art-form. She has been awarded the National Nritya Shiromani award for her contribution towards preserving and promoting the Kathak dance form across the world.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Suspension of Lok Sabha MPs

Speaker Sumitra Mahajan has suspended 45 Lok Sabha members belonging to the TDP and the AIADMK after they created ruckus in the House and continuously disrupted proceedings for days. The action was taken under rule 374A of the Lok Sabha which says they cannot attend the remaining days of the session.

Provisions in this regard:

- Among the tools available to the Speaker for ensuring discipline is the power to force a member to withdraw from the House (for the remaining part of the day), or to place him under suspension.

- The Speaker may invoke Rule 374A in case of "grave disorder occasioned by a member coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House, persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise…". The member concerned, "on being named by the Speaker, stands automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less".
- While the Speaker is empowered to place a member under suspension, the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her. It is for the House, if it so desires, to resolve on a motion to revoke the suspension.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) has adopted a report clearing the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016

- The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.
- The Citizenship Amendment Bill seeks to allow illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan to not be imprisoned or deported.
- It also appeals for the minimum years of residency in India to apply for citizenship to be lessened from at least 11 to six years for such migrants.
- The Bill, however, does not extend to illegal Muslim migrants. It also does not talk about other minority communities in the three neighbouring countries, such as Jews, Bahais etc.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill has not been sitting well with the Assamese as it contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.

Illegal immigrant: According to the Citizenship Act (1955), an illegal immigrant is defined as a person who enters India without a valid passport or stays in the country after the expiry of the visa permit. Also, the immigrant who uses false documents for the immigration process.

Indian citizenship: Indian Citizenship is granted to an individual by the government of the country when he/she complies with the legal formalities, so it's like a judicial concept. The Citizenship Act, 1995 prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship: Birth, Descent, Registration, Naturalization and Incorporation of the territory.

Parliament passes RTE amendment Bill

The Parliament has given its approval for the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018. The features of the amendment proposed are:

- The amendment bill do away with the no-detention policy mentioned in the law.
- The amendment bill now leaves it to the states to decide whether they want to continue the no detention policy.
- The states can choose to hold a regular examination either at the end of Classes 5 and 8, or both.
- Students who fail this test will be provided with additional instructions and the opportunity to appear for a re-examination within two months of the declaration of the result.
- If the student still does not pass the exam, the state government may decide to detain the student.
- If a state decides to continue with the no-detention policy till Class 8, the amendment bill makes it clear that no child can be expelled from school before they complete elementary education

No detention Policy

The features of the No detention policy are:

- The No detention policy was introduced in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The act prohibited schools from detaining students till they complete elementary education.
- The no detention policy banned the practice of making underperforming children repeat classes in elementary school to ensure they do not drop out.
- The no detention policy was brought in to reduce the emphasis on year-end examinations and replace it with a form of evaluation that would track students' progress through the year.

Why the no detention policy was withdrawn?

The Parliamentary Standing Committee had made the following observations:

- The RTE act focused on the quantitative expansion of education. As a result, the quality aspects of teaching and learning were relegated to the backburner.

- The committee noted that there was no pressure on the children to learn and on the teachers to teach. Therefore, there was a need for policy change so as to improve the learning of children at elementary stage of education.
- The NCERT's National Achievement Survey and the ASER report consistently pointed towards the abysmally low learning levels among school children.
- To address these anomalies, a decision was made to leave it to the states to decide on the no detention policy to address the issue of deteriorating quality of education.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Ministry of Commerce clarifies on FDI rules in ecommerce

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) under the Ministry of Commerce has clarified that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rules for e-commerce have not allowed foreign investment in the inventory-based model or multi-brand retailing.

Provisions for FDI in e-commerce

- FDI is allowed only in the business-to-business (B2B) ecommerce segment and not in the business-to-consumer (B2C) segment which in effect is the multi-brand retail or the inventory-based e-commerce model.
- DIPP further has clarified that through FDI in B2B ecommerce, an e-commerce entity providing marketplace will not, directly or indirectly, influence the sale price of goods or services. If it does so, such renders such business would be rendered as an inventory based model.

The DIPP claries that an e-commerce platform operating an inventory based model does not only violate the FDI policy on ecommerce but also circumvents the FDI policy restrictions on multi-brand retail trading

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

GEF assisted Green – Ag Project to transform Indian Agriculture

The Government has launched the "Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environmental benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes" in association with Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The Project:

- The project would be implemented in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely, (i) Madhya Pradesh: Chambal Landscape, (ii) Mizoram: Dampa Landscape, (iii) Odisha: Similipal Landscape, (iv) Rajasthan: Desert National Park Landscape and v) Uttarakhand: Corbett-Rajaji Landscape.
- The Green-Ag project seeks to integrate biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture.
- The project aims to catalyze a transformative change of India's agricultural sector to support the achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.
- The project supports harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments to realise the national and global environmental benefits without compromising on India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

GEF:

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- It is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019

The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019 recently released shows that only few countries have started working towards limiting global warming below 2°C or even at 1.5°C.

CCPI:

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an annual publication by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action Network Europe.

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- Its aim is to put political and social pressure on those countries that have, until now, failed to take ambitious action on climate protection, and to highlight those countries with best practice climate policies.
- It evaluates the climate protection performance of 60 countries, responsible for over 90% of global energy-related CO2 emissions.

India's Performance

- India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.
- Most notably India improved its performance in the Renewable Energy category, joining the group of medium
- However, national experts argue that plans to build new coal-fired power plants may pose a risk of offsetting positive developments in the renewable energy sector.
- Comparatively low levels of per capita GHG emissions and a relatively ambitious mitigation target for 2030 give India an overall high rating in the emissions category.

Global Performance

- Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).
- With the connection of the world's largest solar plant to the grid, Morocco is on track for achieving its target of 42% installed renewable energy capacities by 2020.
- Sweden is in top position, followed by Morocco and Lithuania in the CCPI 2019.
- The bottoms five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

Chang'e-4 spacecraft – China

China's recently launched Chang'e-4 spacecraft which has landed on the dark side of the moon.

Dark Side of the Moon: The moon, though has two sides, is tidally locked with Earth. It rotates exactly once every time it circles our planet, thus keeping the same hemisphere pointing toward Earth at all times. Astronomers refer to the side we always see from Earth as the "near side" and the side we can never see as the "far side (dark side)."

The Mission:

- A Chinese lunar probe named Chang'e-4 made the first-ever landing on the far side of the moon. It carries a rover, which carries out low-frequency radio astronomical observations and probing of structure and mineral composition of the terrain. The instruments include cameras, low-frequency radio spectrum analyser, lunar neutron and radiation dose detectors. With its Chang'e 4 mission, China has possibly become the first country to make a soft landing, which is a landing of a spacecraft during which no serious damage is incurred. Thus, the pioneering landing demonstrates China's growing ambitions as a space power.

Importance of the launch:

- Exploration of - The mission could answer fundamental questions about Earth's only natural satellite, the moon.
- It could reveal formation and early evolution of moon, which could guide astronomers in planetary studies and help in understanding exoplanets.
- Radio Astronomy - Communication devices and satellites have made it too noisy for radio astronomers to easily and accurately interpret signals.
- The near side of the moon also suffers from this problem of noise.
- However, the moon's far side is shielded from all the radio waves emanating from earth.
- Hence, it is an ideal place to set up a radio telescope that could reveal astronomical mysteries, such as the structure of the universe shortly after the Big Bang.
- Also, the difference in the thickness of the crust between the near side and the far side would be studied.
- Human spaceflights - The probe is the first mini-greenhouse to land on another world in the solar system.
- The investigations will reveal whether plants can grow on the moon, which is a crucial step toward long-term human missions beyond Earth. Thus, the mission is a step forward in preparing people to return to the moon for longer than a brief visit.

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