

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**'Paramarsh' Scheme**

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

Aim of Scheme

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

Hub and Spoke Model

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

Mentee Institutions

- He further informed that scheme will lead to enhancement of overall quality of the Mentee Institutions and enhance its profile as a result of improved quality of research, teaching and learning methodologies.
- Mentee Institution will also have increased exposure and speedier adaptation to best practices. "Paramarsh" scheme will also facilitate sharing of knowledge, information and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in Mentee Institutions.

Conclusion

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

Go Tribal Campaign

TRIFED, a Multi-State Co-operative Society under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched the "Go Tribal" campaign.

Campaign

- Products available under Tribes India brand & outlets can also be procured through Online retailers like Amazon, Flipkart, etc. with whom TRIFED has entered into Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- TRIFED has not introduced Khadi Kurtas and Jackets in collaboration with "I Am Khadi" foundation.
- However, in order to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Father of Nation, Tribes India/TRIFED is promoting Khadi based products made by tribal artisans.
- Besides continuing the existing schemes for tribal welfare, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs under its scheme of 'Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP' has included 26 additional Minor Forest Produces for which Minimum Support Price has been notified in December 2018/ January 2019.
- Also better facilities for skill upgradation and value addition for MFPs in the form of Van Dhan Kendras for providing better monetary return to the MFP gatherers have also been included.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Centre had announced hike in surcharges paid by high net worth individuals**

Centre had announced hike in surcharges paid by high net worth individuals. The increase in surcharges effectively increases the combined tax rate by 2% for those earning between Rs.2 crore and 5 crore and by 7% for those earning more than Rs 5 crore annually. The higher tax will only apply to individuals and FPIs registered as trusts, which are also treated as individuals. However, the FPIs that are registered as companies will not be affected. The decision to increase rates drew criticism that it would lead to outflow of foreign funds from India because there would be decreased income as they have to pay more taxes now.

Surcharge

- Surcharge is an additional charge or tax levied on an existing tax. For Example: A surcharge of 10% on a tax rate of 30% effectively raises the combined tax burden to 33%

- Cess is also tax on tax. However, the difference is that Cess is levied temporarily for a specific purpose. Once the purpose has been fulfilled, cess is no longer levied. However, surcharges are general and permanent in nature.
- The revenue earned via surcharge is solely retained by the Centre and, unlike other tax revenues, is not shared with States.
- The proceeds of surcharges flow into Consolidated Fund of India.
- Surcharges, in India, are used to make the taxation system more 'progressive' (average tax rate increases as the income increases) as they are generally levied on wealthy individuals and companies.

FPI

- Foreign Portfolio Investments are those investments which hold less than 10% in a company, beyond which it is regarded as FDI (Foreign Direct Investment).
- FPI hold a short term view on the company and generally participate through the stock markets and gets in and out of a particular stock at much faster frequencies. They are volatile in nature.
- The authority monitoring the guidelines for FPI regulation is the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Agri reforms

A panel of Chief Ministers discussed ways to bring State Governments on board to usher reforms in the agriculture sector.

Significance of the Panel

- Agriculture is a State subject and all the States must be brought on board for simultaneous and time-bound reforms across States and bring effective transformation countrywide.
- Farm sector growth had lagged behind other sectors as it had not been part of the economic reforms of 1991.
- Almost three decades later, the Chief Ministers are attempting to build consensus around structural changes in the agriculture sector.

Reforms Discussed by the Panel

- Central government grants and the Finance Commission allocations should be linked with the agriculture reforms implemented by States.
- The scrapping of the Essential Commodities Act for the food sector and a review of agricultural subsidies.
- Ensuring fair prices and ending manipulative monopolies in the local agriculture produce mandis and removing obstacles to the implementation of the digital e-NAM system in all States.
- Approaches to spur growth in the food processing sector, which must grow at a faster pace than the overall agriculture sector in order to increase farmers' income.
- The need for better coordination between the Agriculture and Commerce Ministries to ensure a dynamic pricing policy based on global market trends for major agricultural commodities.
- Ensure better targeting of subsidy schemes in order to maximize benefits for farmers.
- Ways to reduce credit costs along with improving linkages with financial institutions and increasing private investment in the sector.
- The need for States to adopt the Centre's Model Contract Farming Act.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Assam Floods

Assam is in facing another flood, with 57 lakh people displaced, all 33 districts affected, and 36 people killed besides hundreds of animals. This is the first wave of floods this monsoon, and flood control experts expect at least two more.

Why are floods so destructive in Assam?

- The incessant monsoon rainfall and other natural and man-made factors are the main reasons.
- The nature of the river Brahmaputra is a major factor. It is dynamic and unstable.
- Its basin spreads over four countries: China, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan, with diverse environments.
- The Brahmaputra features among the world's top five rivers in terms of discharge and the sediment it brings.

How do these characteristics of the river relate to flooding?

- The vast amount of sediment comes from Tibet, where the river originates. Tibet region is cold, arid and lacks plantation. Glaciers melt, soil erodes and all of it results in a highly sedimented river.
- By the time the river enters Assam — a state comprising primarily floodplains surrounded by hills on all sides — it deposits vast amounts of this silt, leading to erosion and floods.

- The river comes from a high slope to a flat plain, its velocity decreases suddenly, and this results in the river unloading the sediment. The river's channels are inadequate to handle sediments, leading to floods.
- The region is also an earthquake-prone zone, so the river has not been able to acquire a stable character.
- Besides these natural factors, the man-made factors— habitation, deforestation, population growth in catchment areas (including in China), also lead to higher sedimentation. For example, the sediment deposition itself creates temporary sandbars or river islands.
- It is common for people to settle in such places, which restricts the space the river has to flow. When rainfall is heavy, it combines with all these factors and leads to destructive floods. This happens very frequently.

What are the measures taken by the government?

- The Brahmaputra Board had suggested that dams and reservoirs be built to mitigate floods.
- The objective of this suggestion is to regulate the release of floodwaters, which sometimes can be beyond the capacity of the channels downstream.
- Dam-building plans have been opposed by the locals and environmentalists on grounds of displacement and destruction of ecology, preventing the plans from moving forward.
- A proposed multipurpose dam in the region was scrapped because of objections by the Arunachal government due to submergence concerns, which included a few small towns.
- Therefore the government has been building embankments on the river as the only measure.
- Embankments were proposed only as an interim measure for short-term mitigation, so the government did not spend on high specifications. So, they are not strong enough and are regularly breached.
- The government also considered dredging and making the river deeper, but the experts have advised against this because the Brahmaputra sediment yield is among the highest in the world.

Where lies the solution?

- For a sustainable solution, there needs to be a basin-wide approach to the problem, such as an integrated basin management system.
- It needs to bring in all the basin-sharing countries on board and take measures in catchment areas. For that, interstate relationships, political cooperation and the role of the government are important.
- "Flood-plain" zoning can be adopted as done in the US. Depending on the vulnerability of the area, it is divided into categories, and accordingly, certain activities, such as farming, building a house etc, are banned in those regions.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

National Parks in news: Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh and Bandipur wildlife sanctuary in Karnataka

- India is spending 1300 Crore rupees to build 9 kilometres underpass on National Highway passing through Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh to provide safe passage for wildlife (especially Tigers) in the region.
- Similar demand is being made to build underpass on the National Highway between Mysuru and Waynad to protect tigers in Bandipur wildlife sanctuary.

ODISHA DEVELOPMENT

Odisha to have new Sports Policy

Despite aiming to be the hub of sports in India, there is no sports policy in Odisha, admitted state Sports Minister Tusharkanti Behera. The Minister said the objective of the Sports and Youth Affairs department is being materialised through various schemes, guidelines and notifications from time to time.

The government has recognised 40 sports disciplines in the state and there is a policy to release special grants to different sports associations for organization of national and international championships in Odisha under the aegis of the concerned recognized national federation. Former sports administrators have said that a sports policy will help former players and aspiring players especially those residing in rural areas.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take eyes off your goal.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: To tackle agrarian distress in a sustainable manner, direct income support to farmers needs to be complemented with reforms in agri-marketing and trade policies.

Examine.

Answer: Recently policy think tank Niti Aayog proposed an upfront direct income subsidy through DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) to farmers to provide relief to farmers facing agrarian distress. This will also help in enabling farmers to invest the finances in their required areas of need. State specific examples can also be given, like: KALIA Scheme (Odisha), Rythu Bandhu (Telangana).

Problems:

- As long as the agricultural produce does not get fair and remunerative price through reforms in agri marketing and trade policies agricultural crisis will not be solved.
- The present APMC Act restricts the farmers from selling their produce to processor/manufacturer/ bulk processor, exporter, bulk retailer outside the market yard and the produce is required to be channeled through regulated market.
- Poor farmers may typically get as little as 25% of the prices that consumers finally pay for their produce. The intermediaries between farmers and consumers are the major beneficiaries rather than the growers and end consumers.

Reforms:

- Contract farming is crucial to promote food processing and to provide technical and financial support and quality input to smallholders.
- The Model APMC Act circulated to States/UTs during 2003 provides for contract farming agreement and its model specifications. 20 states amended their APMC Act to make provision for Contract farming but only 12 notified the rules. These rules should be notified by states which have amended APMC acts and those states which not yet amended the act need to act swiftly.
- Direct Sale by Producers to Processing Industries/Exporters/Bulk Buyers - The producer should be free to enter into direct sale without the involvement of other middlemen outside the market yard in the market area under the relevant provisions of the concerned Act. These changes in marketing and trading will break the monopoly of middle men and will ensure farmers are able to get fair prices for their produce.
- De-link the provisions of compulsory requirement of shop/space for registration of traders/market functionaries. At present only the traders/commission agent owning a shop/godown in the regulated market are allowed to purchase produce in the market.
- This practice of compulsory licensing of commission agents/traders in the regulated markets has led to the monopoly of these licensed traders acting as a major entry barrier in existing APMCs for new entrepreneurs, thus, preventing competition.
- Take fruits and vegetables out of APMC Act. Let producers have the right to sell to anyone they choose including integrator, village cooperative, or in APMC Mandi.
- Implementation of e-NAM and e-trading in all States.
- Promoting Cooperatives for marketing. The Amul Dairy Cooperative is an outstanding example of how farmers empowered themselves through cooperation.
- India's agriculture exports were without proper policy backup, which did not create additional value for farmers. To ensure profit for farmers government has unveiled Agriculture Export Policy, 2018 that imposes no restrictions on export of organic and processed products providing institutional ways for market access and settling quality claims.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS BASED MCQS

1. Recently in news, the educational scheme 'Paramammarsh' aims to promote which of the following?
 - (a) Pre-School Educaiotn
 - (b) Primary Education
 - (c) Secondary Education
 - (d) Higher Education**
2. Consider the following statements w.r.t the TRIFED.
 1. It is a Multi-State Co-operative Society under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
 2. Recently it has launched a campaign named "Go Tribal" for sale of tribal products on e-commerce sites.

Which of the statements is/are incorrect?

 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both `1 and 2**
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. Consider the following statements w.r.t Surcharge.
 1. It is an additional charge or tax levied on an existing tax.
 2. It is a temporary provision for a certain task.
 3. The revenue earned via surcharge is solely retained by the Centre
 4. The proceeds of surcharges flow into the Consolidated Fund of India.

Which of the statements are correct?

 - (a) 1,2 and 4
 - (b) 1, 3 and 4**
 - (c) 2, 3 and 4
 - (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
4. The NAM portal is a single window service for any information and services related to APMC that includes which of the following?
 1. Commodity arrivals and prices
 2. Buy and sell trade offers
 3. Provision to respond to trade offers, among other services

Select the correct answer using codes given below

 - (a) 1 and 2
 - (b) 1 and 3
 - (c) 2 and 3
 - (d) 1, 2 and 3**
5. Which of the following statements is/are correct about the Brahmaputra River System?
 1. Its source is very close to the sources of Indus and Satluj.
 2. Mariam La separates the source of the Brahmaputra from the Manasarovar Lake.
 3. It flows southwards in Southern Tibet.
 4. River Manas and and river Teesta are tributaries of Brahmaputra.

Select the correct answer from the codes given below.

 - (a) 1, 2 and 3
 - (b) 2, 3 and 4
 - (c) 1, 2 and 4**
 - (d) 1, 3 and 4
6. Pench National Park belongs to which of the following state?
 - (a) Madhya Pradesh**
 - (b) Maharastra
 - (c) Uttarakhand
 - (d) West Bengal
7. Bandipur Wildlife Sanctuary is located in which of the following state?
 - (a) West Bengal
 - (b) Telengana
 - (c) Karnataka**
 - (d) Maharastra