

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

Acute malnutrition among Saharias, a particularly vulnerable tribal group, due to crushing poverty, delayed breastfeeding, premature pregnancies and seasonal migrations is continuing to take away lives. As a result, every second child under five in the Shivpuri and Sheopur districts of central India is underweight.

About:

- The Saharia, Sahar, Seharia, or Sahariya are an ethnic group mainly found in the districts of Morena, Sheopur, Bhind, Gwalior, Datia, Shivpuri, Vidisha and Guna districts of Madhya Pradesh and Baran district of Rajasthan.
- Saharias are a particularly vulnerable tribal group.
- An Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study revealed that, among Saharias, TB prevalence is an alarming 1,995 per 1,00,000 persons.

Particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs)

- These are separately classified by government of India.
- According to 12th plan, out of the total ST population, 3 % belong to the PTVGs.
- These tribal communities have following features:
- Pre-agricultural system of existence (i.e. practice of hunting and gathering), or
- Zero or negative population growth, or
- Extremely low level of literacy in comparison with other tribal groups.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY
Arbitration And Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2019

The Central Government has enforcement various Sections of the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2019 by notifying it in Gazette.

Salient features of amendment act:

- It amends the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration, and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.
- Arbitration Council of India: It establishes an independent body called the Arbitration Council of India (ACI) for the promotion of arbitration, mediation, conciliation and other alternative dispute redressal mechanisms.
- Composition of the ACI: The ACI will consist of a Chairperson who is either: (i) a Judge of the Supreme Court; or (ii) a Judge of a High Court; or (iii) Chief Justice of a High Court; or (iv) an eminent person with expert knowledge in conduct of arbitration.
- Relaxation of time limits: Under the original Act, arbitral tribunals are required to make their award within a period of 12 months for all arbitration proceedings. The amendment act remove this time restriction for international commercial arbitrations.
- Completion of written submissions: The written claim and the defence to the claim in an arbitration proceeding, should be completed within six months of the appointment of the arbitrators.
- Confidentiality of proceedings: All details of arbitration proceedings will be kept confidential except for the details of the arbitral award in certain circumstances.
- Applicability of Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 2015: It clarifies that the 2015 Act shall only apply to arbitral proceedings which started on or after October 23, 2015.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.
Time-Bank in Madhya Pradesh

Recently, the Madhya Pradesh government's Happiness department has planned to set up a TimeBank. Time Bank would lend currency in exchange for an hour. This earned hour could be used to learn a new skill, without the need to pay any paper money.

The Underlying Idea

- The core value behind this idea is that we all are assets that are driven by reciprocity. Giving focused attention to each & every voice will help promote the equality and dignity of labour.
- It is a new way to link untapped social capacity to unmet social needs.
- Whenever a bank member needs a service or wants to acquire a skill, for e.g, gardening or playing the guitar, the member could exchange a credit worth an hour with another member knowing that particular skill.
- In the beginning, the 50,000 volunteers registered with the department through local networks will form community-level banks and list skills they could impart or services they could offer. This will help in building the trust factor as known individuals will interact with one another.
- Later, an experienced volunteer will induct new members and keep a record of all the transactions.

- It can be considered as a modern barter system.

History

- The idea of Timebank was conceived in 1827. But the concept gained popularity with the setting up of the first Time Bank in Japan in 1973.
- Later, the CEO of TimeBanks U.S.A popularized the idea of Time Dollars.
- Today, there are more than 500 such communities across 32 countries.
- It can also be noted that earlier in October 2018 a panel of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on disability and elderly persons had recommended the “time bank” scheme to take care of senior citizens who are living alone without any support from their family.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

China Funding NGOs Against Hydro Projects

According to Government officials, China is trying to fund certain civil society organizations to incite protests against hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh. NGOs are protesting on India's efforts to revive work on the long-pending hydro projects, including the 2,000 megawatts (MW) Lower Subansiri and 2,880MW Dibang projects by state-run NHPC Ltd. NGO are protesting. for protection of the Forest Rights Act and ecological importance of the region. The region is home to exotic species like barking deer, sambar, wild yak, serow, goral, wild boar, red panda, clouded leopard, snow leopard and musk deer.

Framework on Transboundary River between India and China

- There is no bilateral water treaty between India and China, except only a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Brahmaputra and Sutlej for sharing hydrological data related to floods and emergencies exists.

Reason for the revival of hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh

- China is working on an ambitious \$62-billion south-north water diversion scheme for the Yarlung Tsangpo, the upper stream of the Brahmaputra river.
- China seeks to implement the Brahmaputra project to address its water woes arising from the demographic explosion, industrial upsurge, the rapid expansion of cities, and greater demand for irrigated agriculture farming.
- According to China: 90 % of Tibetan runoff flows downstream to South Asia and Southeast Asia.
- Thereby, China is aggressively working for its priority rights and is actively building dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), to claim it's right under Principle of Prior Appropriation.
- India fears that if China builds dam projects in the Tibetan plateau, it would threaten to reduce the flow of river water into India.
- Therefore, in response to that India is of the view that any delay in building hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh on rivers originating in China will affect India's strategy of establishing its prior-use claim over the waters.

The Principle of Prior Appropriation

- The principle of prior appropriation favours neither upstream or downstream State but the one that puts the water to first use, thereby protecting the right to first use of water as in the past.
- However, according to some experts, 80 % of the waters of the Brahmaputra are added to the river after it enters India. Hence, Chinese building a dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), thus, need not be viewed with alarm.

U.S. Draft troop pullout deal with taliban

U.S. has announced a draft troop pullout deal with Taliban.

- Under a draft peace deal with the Taliban the United States will withdraw 5,400 troops from Afghanistan and close five bases within 135 days.
- The accord requires the insurgent movement to ensure Afghanistan is not used by Al Qaeda or so-called Islamic State as a base for global attacks.
- Top U.S. negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad showed a draft deal to the Afghan president after declaring that they are “at the threshold of an agreement” following the end of the ninth round of U.S.-Taliban talks in Qatar. The agreement still needs President Donald Trump's approval.
- The Taliban, at their strongest since their 2001 defeat by a U.S.-led invasion, want all U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan immediately, while the U.S. seeks a withdrawal in phases that would depend on the Taliban meeting certain conditions such as a reduction in violence.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Imported Inflation

The weakening of the domestic currency in the past two months i.e. July and August 2019 may lead to imported inflation in the country.

Imported Inflation

- When the general price level rises in a country because of the rise in prices of imported commodities, inflation is termed as imported.
 - Two key contributors to India's imports are: Crude Oil and Gold. Rise in prices of these two products lead to rise in the import bill of the country.
 - It is expected that dull global growth prospects would keep crude prices benign. But, higher demand for gold can push prices higher.
- However, inflation may also rise due to the depreciation of the domestic currency, which pushes up the rupee cost of imported items.
 - For example, if the rupee depreciates by 20% against the US dollar in a particular period, the landed rupee cost of an imported product will also go up by the same proportion and will affect the price levels and inflation readings.

Current Causes Behind Depreciation:

- Growing risk aversion amongst investors has resulted in broad losses in the currencies of the Emerging Markets (EM).
- The rupee has been further impacted by escalating tensions in Kashmir and a slightly larger-than-expected repo rate cut from the RBI.

Depreciation of the Currency

- Depreciation of a country's currency refers to a decrease in the value of that country's currency with respect to one or more foreign reference currencies, typically in a floating exchange rate system.
 - In a floating exchange rate system, market forces (based on demand and supply of a currency) determine the value of a currency.
- Example: \$1 used to equal to Rs.60, now \$1 is equal to Rs. 72, implying that the rupee has depreciated relative to the dollar i.e. it takes more rupees to purchase a dollar.
- It happens due to supply and demand-side factors.
- It makes exports more competitive and imports more expensive.
- It is different from devaluation wherein the government of a country makes a conscious decision to lower its exchange rate, basically in a fixed or semi-fixed exchange rate.
 - Fixed exchange rate: This occurs when the government seeks to keep the value of a currency fixed against another currency.
 - Semi-Fixed Exchange Rate. This occurs when the government seeks to keep the value of currency between a band of the exchange rate. In other words, the exchange rate can fluctuate within a narrow band.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Nilgiri Tahr

Recently, Nilgiri tahr's population has increased from 568 in 2018 to 612 in 2019 in the Mukurthi National Park, Tamil Nadu.

- The recent increase has favoured a healthy sex ratio i.e. slightly skewed in favour of female goats.
- There has been almost 27% increase in the population of the tahr in the Nilgiris over the last three years.
- Factors responsible for maintaining an increase in the population of Nilgiri Tahr are:
 - Keeping the national park closed to tourists and free from poaching
 - Fighting the spread of invasive flora.

Nilgiri Tahr

- Nilgiri Tahr is also known as Nilgiri Ibex.
- It has been listed as "Endangered" by IUCN.
- It has been listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which provides absolute protection and offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties
- The Adult males of Nilgiri Tahr species develop a light grey area or "saddle" on their backs and are hence called "Saddlebacks"
- It is the state animal of Tamil Nadu.
- It is found in open montane grassland habitat of rain forests ecoregion.
- It is endemic to the Nilgiri Hills and the southern portion of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu, Kerala

Threats:

- Habitat loss (mainly from domestic livestock and spread of invasive plants)
- Poaching,
- Populations of these animals are small and isolated, making them vulnerable to local extinction,
- Climate Change

International Symposium On Buckwheat

In Meghalaya, a four-day international symposium on buckwheat with the theme "diversifying food systems for health and nutritional security" was organised by North Eastern Hills University, Shillong from 3rd to 6th September 2019.

About:

- Buckwheat suppresses weeds and attracts beneficial insects and pollinators with its abundant blossoms. It extracts soil phosphorus from soil better than most grain-type cover crops.
- Buckwheat is a relatively low input crop that has relatively high yields even in marginal soil. Since it adds nutrients to the soil, it makes a good cover crop or rotational crop.
- Buckwheat thrives in cool, moist conditions but it is not frosted tolerant.
- The flour of buckwheat can be used either as food or as medicine. As a medicine, buckwheat is used to improve blood flow by strengthening veins and small blood vessels; to treat varicose veins and poor circulation in the legs, and to prevent hardening of the arteries.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

Hydrogels with Tunable Bactericidal Activities

Recently, researchers at the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS), Kolkata has fabricated Hydrogels which can be tuned with different bacteria-killing properties.

- These hydrogels were fabricated when the naturally occurring nucleoside molecule cytidine was self-assembled into a hydrogel in the presence of silver acetate and phenyl boronic acid.
- This hydrogel was found to exhibit antibacterial activity against Gram-negative bacterial strains such as E.coli.

Silver Acetate

- Silver is known to have antibacterial property but it may not be used due to its toxicity.
- However, when silver acetate was incorporated in the hydrogel the toxicity was reduced and thus suitable for treating bacterial infections.
- The hydrogel with the presence of silver reduces the cell size of the E.coli and disrupts its cell membrane, leading to leakage of cellular contents.
- The hydrogel containing silver acetate was found to be non-toxic to normal kidney epithelial cells and red blood cells.

Boronic Acid

- By changing the Boronic Acid component in Hydrogel, a large number of hydrogels with different bacteria-killing properties can be created.

Thixotropic property

- It is an ability to change a gel to a sol phase when subjected to mechanical shaking or stirring. When allowed to stand, it returns to its original gel phase.
- The property of certain gels or fluids that are thick or viscous under static conditions and becomes fluid (become thin, less viscous) over time when shaken, agitated, sheared or otherwise stressed is termed as Thixotropy. E.g. Paint, the fluidity vanishes quickly and the surface sets permanent as water (or oil) evaporates.

Uses of Hydrogel

- It can be used for drug delivery applications.
- Intrinsic antibacterial activities.
- Cancer drug chemotherapy

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Give your best, leave the rest.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region is a cause of concern for India and regional stability. Discuss the implications and steps taken by India in this regard.

Answer :

China entered Indian Ocean as part of its collaborative efforts to control piracy and deal with terrorism, which has increased as its dependence on oil imports from the Middle East and Africa has grown. It has increased its presence by developing ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, through CPEC at Gwadar, thereby decreasing India's strategic influence in these countries. India argues that China is trying to surround it with a network of dual-use port facilities in the Indian Ocean, as a 'string of pearls' strategy, thereby raising concern for India.

- China's strategy of 'debt trap': By financing large projects in form of ports including Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar and mega infrastructure in strategically located Maldives ; China is making these nations financially dependent and extremely vulnerable to China's unhindered strategic control over these ports.
- Resolving Malacca dilemma: Close to 80 percent of China's oil imports pass through the Strait of Malacca. After development of Gwadar port India will lose strategic advantage in Indian Ocean as India's geographical location was advantageous for India to counter China in Indian Ocean.
- Pakistan China Axis: Through Gwadar port China is pursuing its old strategy of using Pakistan to secure its interests in the region with renewed focus.
- America's relative decline in Indo Pacific and at the same time China's forays into the Indian Ocean have left India concerned with the shifting maritime balance of power.
- A flotilla of Chinese warships, carried out a high-seas training at east Indian Ocean, through such naval exercise China is trying to project itself in IOR. China's rising footprint in IOR through war exercises is cause of concern for India.
- Freedom of navigation for trade: India is increasing its engagement in the South East Asia region through 'Act East policy' and Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN. However, China's presence in IOR can curtail freedom of navigation in the region hurting India economically.
- Freedom of navigation for energy: India depends on oil imports for its energy needs. Presence of China in Pakistan's Gwadar Port can give China strategic advantage in times of conflict giving it ability to choke India's energy supply.
- China's rising influence in IOR and South China Sea is threatening development of strategic partnership of India with countries in the region. China forced India to withdraw from Vietnam asserting its sovereignty in disputed South China Sea.

Responses by India to counter China's rise in IOR:

- Chabahar Port : India is developing Chabahar Port in this strategic location will allow India to counter China-Pakistan axis in IOR.
- 'Act East Policy' India : Through 'Act East Policy' India has been trying to improve relations with ASEAN and countries like South Korea and Japan enhanced engagement with these countries will ensure India remains engaged in China's neighbourhood to maintain balance of power for regional stability and freedom of navigation in disputed SCS and IOR itself.
- The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor : India has in partnership with Japan has planned for The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor which is seen as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor India- Japan seeks to counter China's rising footprint in IOR.
- The Quad: Through 'Quad initiative' India, Japan and the US will cooperate economically, militarily and strategically for free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large
- Modernizing India's Naval Power: India is modernising its naval power. It has completed its Nuclear Triad by commissioning INS Arihant and has inducted INS Vikramaditya, in Navy in 2013 further it is indigenously building another aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

Conclusion

Thus India is trying to balance China's rise in IOR through multiple policy interventions which include building bilateral and multiple regional alliances like 'Quad' and Asia-Africa Growth Corridor building, naval infrastructure and naval capacity. India favours that the regional disputes like SCS should be resolved in peaceful manner to ensure regional stability. India favour rule based maritime order and favours freedom of navigation in IOR as well as wider Indo-Pacific region.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQS

1. Which of the following states has proposed to organized a Time Bank?
 - (a) Gujarat
 - (b) Madhya Pradesh**
 - (c) Haryana
 - (d) Kerala
2. With reference to the Nilgiri tahr, consider the following statements:
 1. It is the state animal of Kerala.
 2. Eravikulam National Park is home to its largest population.Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only**
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. Which of the following statements is not correct about the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)?
 - (a) In 2006, the Government of India renamed the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
 - (b) They reside in 18 States and UT of A&N Islands.
 - (c) There are 175 PVTGs officially notified in the country so far.**
 - (d) Saharias are a particularly vulnerable tribal group.
4. With reference to the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2019, consider the following statements:
 1. It establishes an independent body called the Arbitration Council of India (ACI).
 2. The ACI will consist of a Chairperson who should be a retired Chief Justice of India.
 3. The amendment act remove this time restriction for international commercial arbitrations.Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - (a) 1 and 2
 - (b) 1 and 3**
 - (c) 2 and 3
 - (d) 1, 2 and 3
5. With reference to Imported Inflation, Consider the following statements:
 1. It is the result of a general rise in prices of imported commodities.
 2. In the context of India, crude oil imports can result in cost-push inflation.Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2**
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2