

**GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**

**School Education Quality Index(SEQI)**

The School Education Quality Index (SEQI) was developed to evaluate the performance of States and Union Territories (UTs) in the school education sector. The index aims to bring an outcomes focus to education policy by providing States and UTs with a platform to identify their strengths and weaknesses and undertake requisite course corrections or policy interventions. In line with NITI Aayog's mandate to foster the spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism, the index strives to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices across States and UTs.

**Aim and Purpose:**

- SEQI aims to drive policy reforms that will improve the quality of school education. The index seeks to institutionalise a focus on enhancing education outcomes by driving improvements in learning levels, access, equity, infrastructure and governance processes.
- The index recognises that school education is a subject on the Concurrent List and that State-level leadership is crucial for improving outcomes in a cost-effective manner. The index will serve as a regular and transparent review of the status of school education quality across the States and UTs.
- Developed through a collaborative process including key stakeholders such as MHRD, the World Bank and sector experts, the index consists of 30 critical indicators that assess the delivery of quality education.
- To facilitate like-to-like comparisons, States and UTs have been grouped as Large States, Small States and Union Territories. Within each of these groups, the indicator values have been appropriately scaled, normalized and weighted to generate an overall performance score and ranking for each State and UT.
- States and UTs are ranked on their overall performance in the reference year 2016-17, as well as on the change in their performance between the reference year and base year (2015-16). The rankings present incredible insights on the status of school education across States/UTs and their relative progress over time.

**Report Analysis:**

- The School Education Quality Index, SEQI prepared by NITI Aayog was launched by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman and CEO in New Delhi on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Kerala has bagged the number one rank followed by Rajasthan in overall performance.
- Karnataka stands at 3rd place. In incremental performance ranking, Haryana is number one followed by Assam and Uttar Pradesh.
- Odisha ranked 7 in large states category in school education quality index (SEQI) for 2016-17.
- In small states category, Manipur has claimed the top spot followed by Tripura and Goa in overall performance. Meghalaya got the first place in incremental performance ranking followed by Nagaland and Goa.
- Talking to media, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant says incremental states are important as they have made quantum jump.

**Supreme Court Recalls Its Directions Regarding SC/ST Act**

- The Supreme Court has recalled its direction in the March 20, 2018 verdict which had virtually diluted provisions of arrest under the SC/ST Act.
- A bench of justices Arun Mishra, M.R. Shah and B.R. Gavai said the struggle of SC/ST people for equality is still not over in the country. The bench said SC/ST people still face untouchability, abuse and are being socially outcast.
- The apex court further said the Constitution provides for protection of SC/ST people under Article 15 but they still face social abuse and discrimination.
- Dealing with the misuse of provisions of SC/ST Act and lodging of false cases, the bench said it is not due to the caste system but due to human failure.

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**

**World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2019**

- The World Digital Competitiveness Ranking measures the capacity of countries to develop, adopt and explore digital technologies, which transform business models, government practices and society in general.
- The Index ranks the countries based on the following three factors:

- Knowledge: The capacity to understand and learn new technologies.
- Technology: The competence to develop new digital innovations.
- Future readiness: The preparedness for the coming developments.
- Now in its third year, the IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking measures the capacity and readiness of 63 economies to adopt and explore digital technologies as a key driver for economic transformation in business, government and wider society.
- The ranking is produced by the *IMD World Competitiveness Center*.
- Top 5 countries in World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2019 are: United States, Singapore, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland.
- India rose from 48th place in 2018 to 44th rank this year
- Many Asian nations showed significant growth from last year in digital competitiveness, as Hong Kong and South Korea entered the top 10 for the first time, Taiwan moved up to the 13th place and China made a huge jump from the 30th position to the 22nd.
- Indonesia also showed massive growth by rising to 56th rank from its 62nd rank in 2018. China showed significant improvement in the knowledge factor.

### **United Nations Gandhi Solar Park**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated a 50 kilowatt 'Gandhi Solar Park' at the Headquarters of the United Nations, on the second leg of his visit to the United States. World leaders including Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President of South Korea Moon-Jae-in were also present at the occasion in New York.

#### **About 'Gandhi Solar Park':**

- At a contribution of about \$1 million, India has gifted solar panels that have been installed on the roof of UN Headquarters. There are total 193 panels in this roof-top solar park, with one panel each for every 193 UN Member State.
- The solar panels are powered up to reach max of 50 KW of power generation. The energy generated in park is equivalent to energy that would have been created through use of 30,000 kilograms of coal. It also has a carbon sequestration of 1000 seedlings which will grow into trees over a period of 10 years.

The leaders also launched a United Nations (UN) postage stamp of Mahatma Gandhi, at the programme 'Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in the Contemporary World' at the UN headquarters.

The event was hosted to celebrate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, which will underline the continuing relevance of Gandhian thoughts and values in today's world. Mr. Modi reiterated India's commitment to the creation of 175 GW renewable energy capacities by 2022 under the Paris Climate Agreement.

### **Saudi plans to invest \$100b in India**

- Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, is looking at investing \$100 billion in India in areas of petrochemicals, infrastructure and mining among others, considering the country's growth potential.
- Saudi Ambassador Dr. Saud bin Mohammed Al Sati has said India is an attractive investment destination for Saudi Arabia and it is eyeing long-term partnerships with New Delhi in key sectors such as oil, gas and mining.
- The envoy said investing in India's value chain from oil supply, marketing, refining to petrochemicals and lubricants is a key part of Aramco's global downstream strategy.
- Saudi Arabia is a key pillar of India's energy security, being a source of 17% or more of crude oil and 32% of LPG requirements of India.
- The envoy said more than 40 opportunities for joint collaboration and investments across various sectors have been identified between India and Saudi Arabia in 2019, adding the current bilateral trade of USD 34 billion will undoubtedly continue to increase.
- Talking about 'Vision 2030', Mr. Al Sati said Saudi Arabia is working towards transforming its economy and looking at a post-oil age of world-class technological research, start-up and entrepreneurial vigour.

**INDIAN ECONOMY****New policy to de incentivise pre 2005 vehicles**

- The much-awaited vehicle scrappage policy that has gone for a Cabinet approval is likely to see stringent registration and fitness norms for pre-2005 manufactured vehicles, according to sources.
- As per estimates, there are about 2 crore pre-2005 built vehicles that are plying on Indian roads and the move is aimed at de-incentivising such vehicles in view of about 10 to 25 times higher pollution emission by them under the new emission norms.
- Last week, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said that he had cleared a Cabinet note on the proposed policy and a decision is expected on it soon.
- Indian vehicle market has grown exponentially. If old pollution norms are compared with new emission regulations, pre-2005 vehicles are polluting 10 to 25 times more under the new norms, sources said.
- Even if those old vehicles are maintained properly, they will be polluting more with more emissions and will prove to be a hazard for road safety. The policy, if finalised, may have provisions that on scrapping of old vehicles, buying new vehicles could be given concessions by dealers on the basis of certificates of vehicle scrapping, the sources said.
- The minister had earlier said that once the policy is approved India could emerge as a hub for automobile manufacturing as key raw material available from scrapping like steel, aluminium and plastic are bound to be recycled, bringing down automobile prices by “20-30 per cent%”.

**RBI to promote innovations and ideas in payment via contests**

- Reserve Bank of India has announced two contests to promote innovations and ideas in the payment and settlement systems.
- Shortlisted participants will get an opportunity to present their ideas before a jury of eminent persons while outstanding innovators will be awarded prizes and citations.
- The contest will be organised through Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT), Hyderabad.
- While individuals, groups, entrepreneurs, companies, start-ups and similar entities can participate in ‘Payment and Settlement Systems Innovation Contest’, students at the undergraduate or above levels can participate in ‘Payment and Settlement Systems Innovative Ideas Competition’.
- The submissions can be made under the categories of Offline payments, Payment options for feature phone users, Simple and easy Know Your Customer, Automated online dispute redressal systems, Cross border remittances and Safety and security in payment systems among others.

**Govt.issues directions regarding payment of stipend to trade apprentices**

- The Government has issued a notification regarding minimum stipend payable to trade apprentices.
- This was stated by Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Dr.Mahendra Nath Pandey at State Ministers’ Conference on Skill Development in New Delhi.
- He said a minimum stipend will be given based on one's qualification and it will be in the range of five thousand to nine thousand rupees per month from now onwards.
- He further said that employers having four or more workers are eligible to engage apprentices. The minister stressed the need to create a new structure of KaushalVikasMitra from State to village level.
- Dr.Pandey said the government has accorded priority to skill development, and appealed to States to take all possible steps to implement the law related to apprenticeship in companies.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC****Project NETRA by ISRO****Background:**

- On 27 March 2019, India tested an Anti-satellite weapon in an operation code named Mission Shakti. According to NASA, 49 tracked pieces of debris remains in orbit as of 15 July 2019. Indian missile experts criticized this claim by mentioning that debris was generated in similar

tests by the US, adding that the debris doesn't pose a threat to any spacecraft because it is in a very low orbit.

- Space junk is a threat to active satellites and spaceships. The Earth's orbit may even become impassable as the risk of collision grows too high.

**About:**

- ISRO has initiated 'Project NETRA(Network for space object Tracking and Analysis).' – an early warning system in space to detect debris and other hazards to Indian satellites.
- The project will give India its own capability in space situational awareness (SSA) like the other space powers — which is used to 'predict' threats from debris to Indian satellites.
- NETRA's eventual goal is to capture the GEO, or geostationary orbit, scene at 36,000 km where communication satellites operate.
- The space agency says our SSA will first be for low-earth orbits or LEO which have remote-sensing spacecraft.
- Under NETRA the ISRO plans to put up many observational facilities: connected radars, telescopes; data processing units and a control centre.
- They can, among others, spot, track and catalogue objects as small as 10 cm, up to a range of 3,400 km and equal to a space orbit of around 2,000 km.
- The NETRA effort would make India a part of international efforts towards tracking, warning about and mitigating space debris.
- In the plans are a high-precision, long range telescope in Leh and a radar in the North East.
- Along with them, we will also use the MultiObject Tracking Radar (MOTR) that we have put up at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and the telescopes at Ponmudi and Mount Abu to get a broad SSA picture.

**International measures:**

Since 2012, the European Space Agency has designed a mission to remove large space debris from orbit. The mission, e.Deorbit, is scheduled for launch during 2023 with an objective to remove debris heavier than 4,000 kilograms (8,800 lb) from LEO.

**DRDO successfully test fires Brahmos supersonic cruise missile**

- Defence Research and Development Organization, DRDO, successfully test-fired a land-attack version of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile off the coast of Odisha from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur on Monday.
- The missile, with a strike range of 290km, can be fired from land as well as sea-based platforms.
- Defence sources said it has been fitted with increased indigenous equipment and is a version used by the Army.
- On 11 March, 2017, the first extended version of the missile was successfully tested. It had a strike range of 450 kilometres.

**HEALTH AND EDUCATION****PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana (PMJAY) health insurance scheme**

- The PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana (PMJAY) health insurance scheme is set to offer teleconsultation services to its patients soon.
- The move is part of the Centre's plans to widen the coverage of the scheme and thus reduce the incidence of catastrophic health expenditures, and improve access and quality of health services in the public and private sectors, according to a senior health ministry official.
- The Minister added that Ayushman Bharat — among the world's biggest public healthcare schemes — would also offer teleconsultation through 1.5 lakh centres, which would be operationalised by December 2022.
- Elaborating on the benefits that have accrued from the AB-HWCs, the Health Minister said that more than 1.5 crore people had been screened for hypertension, with more than 70 lakh of them put on treatment; similarly, a population of about 1.3 crore was screened for diabetes and more than 31 lakh people were now on treatment.
- The Ministry was also pushing for the expansion of AB-PMJAY, through its system of incentives in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. It was also looking at overhauling the existing health benefits packages and rationalising the cost of the packages to remove any aberrations.

**Paraquat Herbicide:****Background:**

The use of herbicide Paraquat killed around 170 people in the last two years in Odisha's Burla district leading to demands for its ban.

**About:**

- Paraquat is a toxic chemical that is widely used as an herbicide (plant killer), primarily for weed and grass control.
- Paraquat also figures on the list of 99 pesticides and herbicides the Supreme Court to ban in an ongoing case.
- Paraquat dichloride is being used for 25 crops in India
- So far in India, only Kerala has banned the herbicide. There is no antidote to this herbicide, the consumers of which complain of kidney, liver and lung problems.
- They may recover from kidney problems, but die of lung and liver related ailments. Some also witness kidney failure.
- Paraquat is yet to be listed in the prior informed consent (PIC) of Rotterdam Convention, is an international treaty on import/export of hazardous chemicals signed in 1998.
- If a chemical figures in the PIC, the exporting country has to take the importing nation's prior consent before exporting it.

**Rotterdam Convention:**

The Rotterdam Convention is formally known as the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade.

It is a multilateral treaty to promote shared responsibilities in relation to importation of hazardous chemicals. India is a party to the convention, with 161 other parties.

**ART AND CULTURE****Aadi Mahotsav:**

- Aadi Mahotsav (Tribal Festival) is organized by Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED), Ministry of Tribal Affairs in Noida (UP). Smt. Renuka Singh, Minister of State for Tribal Affairs inaugurated the festival. Shri Deepak Khandekar, Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Shri Ramesh Chand Meena, Chairman TRIFED and many dignitaries were present on the occasion.
- TRIFED is doing an excellent job by holding such purposeful programmes across the country for connecting people and integrating India and for offering tribal artisans a platform to showcase their artistic creations to a bigger and wider market.
- Sh. Ramesh Chand Meena elaborately explained that apart from handicrafts, the tribes gather from the forests a range of forest produces which include various tree-borne products like flowers, fruits, seeds, barks and leaves and various insect produces like honey. All these are hundred percent organic products.
- Knowing that organic food products command a premium price, TRIFED plans to tap this premium niche market, thus, ensuring that the benefit of higher prices accrues to the tribals.
- TRIFED is engaged, heart and soul, in ameliorating the lot of small and marginal artists and artisans by inviting them to such mega cultural event and offering them space and genuine price of their product from the buyers. This also helps them to get rid of the middlemen usurping their profits. For the first time, tribal merchandize payments will be accepted through credit and debit cards in line with the national aspiration to go cashless.
- TRIFED is promoting all their tribal products on ONLINE platform too which is Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Paytm & GeMin a very aggressive way.

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Don't wait for opportunity: Create it.**



## **DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns. Discuss the environmental and strategic importance of Arctic region for India.**

**Ans.**

The Arctic region has gained strategic relevance due to the opening up of new routes as a result of climate change-induced ice-melt. It has also paved the way for untapped hydrocarbon and mineral resources to be exploited.

The issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the region are overlooked by an intergovernmental forum, the Arctic Council. Though India is not strategically located in the region, yet it has been given the observer status of this forum.

Body

**Importance of the Arctic region for India:**

**Environmental Importance:**

- **Raising concerns for Climate change:** India is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Also, studies indicate a strong correlation of melting Arctic ice and the Indian Monsoons. Therefore, Arctic Council can serve as a platform to raise India's bid for promoting sustainable development.
- **Scientific Research:** Study and research regarding warming of the Arctic will help India to develop an understanding of fast-melting glaciers in the Himalayas, which is referred to as the Third Pole.

**Strategic importance**

- **Extension of 'Act-East' policy:** An 'Indo-Arctic' initiative as a strategic construct could open political space for India to work with like-minded countries to expand its footprint in the Arctic through its coasts by the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea.
- **Harnessing unexploited potential in Arctic governance:** It provides opportunity to engage with the Arctic nations as well as other observer nations through Working Groups such as the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Norway.
- **Investment opportunity:** The region provides immense opportunity for investment in infrastructure development projects, icebreaker vessels, cargo delivery stations, and scientific activities for Indian firms.

**Way Forward**

- India should take comprehensive measures in the environmental governance and strategic areas that are in consonance with its great-power aspirations. Following steps can be taken to increase its engagement in the region:
- India should utilize its good relations with the member states for cooperating on shared production projects and offshore oil and gas exploration.
- For ex: Indian projects like ONGC holding stake in Sakhalin-I project, GAIL's 20 year agreement with Russian giant Gazprom for supply of LNG, can be seen in this light.
- India being unable to gain as much as China, Japan and South Korea due to their strategic locations, it should channel its energy towards science and environmental concerns in the region.

Several research stations in the Arctic are functional all-year-round but India's research station, Himadri is not operational in the winter. In this respect, improved facilities that increase the operability of Himadri will aid its research programme.

Unlike Antarctica, the **Arctic is not considered a 'global commons'**. Therefore, India should steer away from advocating for an Arctic commons and instead, it must ensure that the environment is strongly considered at the centre of all debates at the Arctic Council.