

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC
Reservation For Persons With Disabilities

Supreme court (SC) has affirmed 3% quota for disabled persons both in direct recruitment and in promotions in PSUs.

About:

- The Supreme Court has granted relief to persons with disabilities by allowing reservation in promotion in all groups for those employed in public sector jobs. It confirmed that 3% reservation should be given to disabled persons both in direct recruitment and in promotions.

Arguments by court:

- Reservation for disabled is granted under Article 16(1) of the Constitution.
- The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 emphasises that “employment is a key factor in the empowerment and inclusion of people with disabilities”.

Rajeev Kumar Gupta judgment (2016):

- The judgment confirms a 2016 verdict of the top court in Rajeev Kumar Gupta’s case that granted reservation in promotion to disabled persons employed in Groups A and B in addition to Groups C and D in the public sector.
- The 2016 judgment had held that wherever posts were identified to be suitable for persons with disabilities, 3% reservation must be given.
- The government had however challenged the judgement, leading to the reference to the larger Bench. The government had referred to the Indra Sawhney case, which had capped reservation at 50% and prohibited reservation in promotions.
- But supreme court countered that the Sawhney judgment only pertained to the Backward Classes. It has no relevance to the case of persons with disabilities.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY
Thai Amavasai

Thai Amavasai was observed throughout Tamil Nadu with devotion and traditional rites on January 24.

About:

- Thai Amavasai is the first New Moon that comes after the Sun starts moving towards the Northern hemisphere.
- The day is believed to be astrologically significant and hence considered to be holy. Bathing in holy rivers and offering rituals to ancestors form important aspects of the Amavasai day.
- People gathered to perform rituals at Poompuhar in Nagapattinam district, where the Cauvery River joins the Bay of Bengal. In the famous sea shore Shiva temple of Rameswaram, rituals are conducted on the famous glass idol.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY
National Voters’ Day

The 10th National Voters’ Day (NVD) is being celebrated on January 25, 2020. The theme for NVD-2020 is ‘Electoral Literacy for Stronger Democracy’.

About:

- Date of celebration: January 25 (to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950).
- Background: It is celebrated every year since 2011.
- Objective: To encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrolment, especially for the new voters; To spread awareness among voters for promoting informed participation in the elections.

Criminalisation Of Politics

The Supreme Court agreed to examine a proposition made by the Election Commission (EC) to ask political parties to not give ticket to those with criminal antecedents.

About:

- The Bench also agreed to come up with a joint proposal detailing how it can be ensured that parties did not fall in with criminal politicians. Senior advocate Vikas Singh said 46% of Members of Parliament have criminal records.
- A September 2018 judgment of a Constitution Bench led by then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra had directed political parties to publish online the pending criminal cases against their candidates. The judgment had also urged Parliament to bring a “strong law” to cleanse political parties of leaders facing trial for serious crimes.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS
Ashuganj-Akhaura Road Project

India and Bangladesh signed an agreement to upgrade the 50 km long road between Ashuganj river port and the Akhaura land port in Bangladesh into a 4-lane highway.

About:

- The project is part of the dollar 2 billion second line of credit extended by India to Bangladesh in 2016. The project will boost connectivity between Bangladesh and North-eastern part of India which will facilitate sub-regional connectivity among South and South-east Asian countries.
- The deal to upgrade the 39 km long road between Ashuganj river port to Dharhar area was signed between the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) of Bangladesh and an Indian Company Afcons Infrastructure Limited.
- The RHD and an India-Bangladesh joint venture firm will take up the work of upgrading the remaining part of the road from Dharhar to Akhaura.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

IFSC Banking Units (IBUS)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has notified IFSC Banking Units (IBUs) participation in Rupee exchange traded currency derivatives.

About:

- In regard to IFSC Banking Units (IBUs) being allowed to participate in exchange traded currency derivatives on rupee listed on stock exchanges set up at IFSCs, the RBI said banks should ensure their IBUs should have necessary expertise to price, value and compute the capital charge and manage the risks associated with the products /transactions intended to be offered.
- The RBI also stated that banks should also obtain their board's approval for undertaking such transactions.
- RBI had earlier accepted the recommendation made by the Task Force on Offshore Rupee Markets chaired by Usha Thorat following which it permitted rupee derivatives (with settlement in foreign currency) to be traded in IFSC.

Related Info:

- In April 2015, the Reserve Bank had formulated a scheme for setting up of International Financial Services Centres (IFSC) Banking Units (IBUs) by banks in IFSCs.
- An IBU is equivalent to an Overseas Branch for all practical purposes. It facilitates a base for world class International Banking services in the country.

Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)

The Department of Telecom (DoT) announced that it will not take any 'coercive' action against telecom companies that failed to meet the January 23 deadline to pay dues related to adjusted gross revenue (AGR) as per the Supreme Court's recent order.

About:

- The order comes as a huge relief for operators — mainly Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea — that would have otherwise faced possible contempt action for not paying dues by the deadline. Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea together owe the telecom department Rs 88,624 crore.
- There is no change in the amount they have to pay — however, it buys them time as they hope for relief from the Supreme Court, which will soon hear their plea seeking permission to negotiate the timeline for payment of dues with the DoT.

Background:

- Meaning of AGR: Telecom operators are required to pay licence fee and spectrum charges in the form of 'revenue share' to the Government. The revenue amount used to calculate this revenue share is known as AGR.
- Debate over definition? The definition of AGR has been under litigation for 14 years. While telecom companies argued that it should comprise revenue from telecom services, the Department of Telecom (DoT)'s stand was that the AGR should include all revenue earned by an operator, including that from non-core telecom operations.
- Supreme court order: In October 2019, the Supreme Court of India upheld the DoT's interpretation of AGR, which came as a huge blow to telecom service providers. Following the order, the telcos are now staring at dues of around ₹ 1 lakh crore.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

India Climate Collaborative (ICC)

Philanthropy arms of top corporates, including the Tatas, Mahindras, Godrejs and Premjis, announced a partnership to minimise the climate change impact.

About:

- The India Climate Collaborative (ICC) will be working to strengthen the climate community locally, build a climate narrative and drive solutions that will ensure both the natural world and people thrive.

- The announcement comes amid an increased conversation on climate change, with the 50th session of the World Economic Forum in Davos generating the maximum flutter, which has also seen US President Donald Trump calling the greens “prophets of doom”.

E-Waste Clinic

India's first e-waste clinic opened in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

About:

- The e-waste clinic is jointly setting up by the Central Pollution Control Board-CPCB and Bhopal Municipal Corporation-BMC.
- It would enable segregation, processing and disposal of waste from both household and commercial units. Electronic waste will be collected door-to-door or could be deposited directly at the e-waste clinic. The CPCB will provide technical support to the clinic.
- The e-waste clinic is being started on the basis of a three-month pilot project. If this project is successful, e-waste clinics will be established at other places in the country.

Biorocks

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), with help from Gujarat's Forest Department, is attempting for the first time a process to restore coral reefs using biorock or mineral accretion technology.

About:

Meaning: Biorock is the name given to the substance formed by electro accumulation of minerals dissolved in seawater on steel structures that are lowered onto the sea bed and are connected to a power source, in this case solar panels that float on the surface.

Working:

- The technology works by passing a small amount of electrical current through electrodes in the water.
- When a positively charged anode and negatively charged cathode are placed on the sea floor, with an electric current flowing between them, calcium ions combine with carbonate ions and adhere to the structure (cathode). This results in calcium carbonate formation. Coral larvae adhere to the CaCO₃ and grow quickly.
- Significance: Technology helps corals to counter the threats posed by global warming.

Recent imitative:

- A biorock structure was installed one nautical mile off the Mithapur coast in the Gulf of Kutch on January 19.
- The location for installing the biorock had been chosen keeping in mind the high tidal amplitude in the Gulf of Kutch. The low tide depth where the biorock has been installed is four metres, and at high tide it is about eight metres.

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

Vyommitra

ISRO introduced Vyommitra, a half-humanoid to an international gathering on January 23, 2020.

About:

- Vyommitra will be sent to space as a trial before Gaganyaan, which will be launched in 2022.
- The humanoid will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022. Two trial flights without crew will take place with a humanoid — the first around December 2020 and the second around July 2021.
- Vyom Mitra is the result of a year-long effort of the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit in Thiruvananthapuram.

Natrialba Swarupiae

Scientists at the National Centre for Microbial Resource — National Centre for Cell Science (NCCR-NCCS) in Pune have reported a new archaeon (a kind of microorganism), which they discovered in Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan.

Archaea:

- Archaea (singular archaeon) are a primitive group of microorganisms that thrive in extreme habitats such as hot springs, cold deserts and hypersaline lakes.
- These slow-growing organisms are also present in the human gut, and have a potential relationship with human health.
- They are known for producing antimicrobial molecules, and for anti-oxidant activity with applications in eco-friendly waste-water treatment.
- Archaea are extremely difficult to culture due to challenges in providing natural conditions in a laboratory setting.

Natrialba swarupiae:

- The new archaeon discovered in Sambhar Lake has been named *Natrialba swarupiae*, after Dr Renu Swarup, secretary, Department of Biotechnology, for her initiative in supporting microbial diversity studies in the country.
- Once the new organism was found, it took researchers one year to complete the study because archaea grow so slow.

Resiniferatoxin

Researchers have identified for the first time the mechanism by which chronic stress causes hair colour loss, an advance that may lead to the development of novel drugs which can prevent the whitening of hair.

About:

- In the study, scientists induced intense pain in special black mice for several weeks using a substance called resiniferatoxin, and turned the animals' fur completely white.
- Resiniferatoxin, which activated sensory nerve fibres, is a naturally occurring chemical found in resin spurge (*Euphorbia resinifera*), a cactus-like plant native to Morocco.
- According to the scientists, the sympathetic nervous system, which triggers the body's rapid involuntary response to dangerous situations, is affected directly by the stress, and consists of nerves that branch from the spine and run throughout the body. The researchers observed that when the sympathetic nervous system was blocked, hair whitening was curbed.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC

3rd Khelo India Youth Games

The 3rd Khelo India Youth Games recently concluded in Guwahati, Assam. The champions trophy was handed over to Maharashtra, first runner up trophy to Haryana and second runner up trophy to Delhi.

About:

- Background: Khelo India Youth Games is an annual event. The first edition was held in 2018 in Delhi. The second edition was held in Pune, Maharashtra.
- Objective: To revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
- Categories: It is held for two categories, namely under-17 years school students and under-21 college students.
- Target: 1000 players will be selected from Khelo India Games and will be given 5 Lakh rupees scholarship per year for the next 8 years.
- Organized by: Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.

Tatrakshak Medals

The President of India has approved Tatrakshak Medals to the personnel of the Indian Coast Guard for their act of conspicuous gallantry/meritorious service on the occasion of Republic Day 2020.

About:

- He awarded three Tatrakshak Medals (Gallantry) and two Tatrakshak Medal (Meritorious Service) to the Indian Coast Guard personnel for their act of conspicuous gallantry and distinguished/meritorious service.
- These awards are being given to the personnel of Indian Coast Guard on Republic Day and Independence Day every year, since January 26, 1990 onwards.

Jeevan Raksha Padak

President of India Ram Nath Kovind has approved the conferment of Jeevan Raksha Padak Series of Awards - 2019 on 54 persons.

About:

- Objective: Jeevan Raksha Padak series of awards are given to a person for meritorious act of human nature in saving the life of a person.
- Categories: The award is given in three categories, namely,
 - Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak,
 - Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak and
 - Jeevan Raksha Padak.
- Eligibility: Persons of all walks of life are eligible for these awards. The award can also be conferred
- Award ceremony: The decoration of the award (medal, certificate signed by the Union Home Minister and lump sum monetary allowance) is presented to the awardee in due course by the respective Union Ministries/Organizations/State Government to which the awardee belongs.
- Recent winners: This includes Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak to seven, Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak to eight and Jeevan Raksha Padak to 39 persons. Five awards are posthumous.

Padma Awards 2020

Padma Awards 2020 were announced on the eve of Republic Day. This year the President of India has approved conferment of 141 Padma Awards including 4 duo cases (in a duo case, the Award is counted as one) as per list

below. The list comprises of 7 Padma Vibhushan, 16 Padma Bhushan and 118 Padma Shri Awards. The list also includes 18 persons from the category of Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI and 12 Posthumous awardees.

About:

- Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian Awards of the country conferred in three categories, namely –Padma Vibhushan: For Exceptional and distinguished service, Padma Bhushan: For Distinguished service of high order, Padma Shri: For distinguished service in any field.
- Disciplines in which awarded: It is given for distinguished and exceptional achievements/service in all fields of activities/disciplines.
- Eligibility: All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these Awards.
- Timeline: The awards are announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year. These awards are conferred by the President of India at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan usually around March/ April every year.

Award committee:

- The nomination process is open to the public. Even self-nomination can be made.
- All nominations received for Padma Awards are placed before the Padma Awards Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary, which is constituted by the PM every year.
- The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the PM and the President for approval.
- The awardees are then presented a certificate and a medallion. The recipients are also given a small replica of the medallion, which they can wear during any ceremonial/State functions etc., if the awardees so desire.

Clarification:

- The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.
- The total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.
- The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously.
- A higher category of Padma award can be conferred on a person only after a gap of five years. However, in highly deserving cases, a relaxation can be made by the Awards Committee.

List of Padma Vibhushan Awardees (7):

- George Fernandes (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Bihar
- Arun Jaitley (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Delhi
- Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK Public Affairs, Mauritius
- C. Mary Kom, Sports, Manipur
- Chhannulal Mishra, Art, Uttar Pradesh
- Sushma Swaraj (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Delhi
- Vishveshateertha Swamiji (Posthumous), Others-Spiritualism, Karnataka

List of Padma Bhushan Awardees (16):

- Manohar Parrikar (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Goa
- V. Sindhu, Sports, Telangana
- Mumtaz Ali (Sri M), Others-Spiritualism, Kerala
- Syed Muazzem Ali (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Bangladesh
- Muzaffar Hussain Baig, Public Affairs, JK
- Ajoy Chakravorty, Art, West Bengal
- Manoj Das, Literature & Education, Puducherry
- Balkrishna Doshi, Others-Architecture, Gujarat
- Krishnammal Jagannathan, Social Work, Tamil Nadu
- C. Jamir, Public Affairs, Nagaland
- Anil Prakash Joshi, Social Work, Uttarakhand
- Tsering Landol, Medicine, Ladakh
- Anand Mahindra, Trade and Industry, Maharashtra
- N R Madhava Menon (Posthumous), Public Affairs, Kerala
- Jagdish Sheth, Literature and Education, USA
- Venu Srinivasan, Trade and Industry, Tamil Nadu

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: Sustainable development does not end sustainability of environment and resource system; it also requires sustainability of economic and social systems. Explain.

Ans:

Sustainable Development is a model by which the present generation's needs are fulfilled alongside integrity for sustaining future generations needs is not compromised. This requires human development such that sustainability of natural ecosystem is maintained by its preservation and reforming economic and social systems that depend upon it.

Sustainability of Environment

- Reducing overexploitation of natural resources like forest and water, allowing for nature for their regeneration. E.g.: Ban on sand mining in mangroves in India.
 - Reducing pollution that disturbs ecosystem and its components inhibiting its regenerative capacity like lowering greenhouse gas emissions through Paris Goals.
- Conservation and Preservation techniques on lines of biodiversity conservation so that ecosystem services are continuously provided, like National Parks, Biodiversity Hotspots.

Need for sustainability of Economic and Social Systems

- Social issues like poverty, inequality, inaccessibility to clean water etc. breeds ground for conflicts resulting in challenges to progress made in environmental conservation, for example taking away of forest rights from tribals lead them into illegal activities like poaching by threatening their traditional livelihoods.
- Rising population, individualistic and consumerist attitude requires more resource consumption per capita, more wastage leading again pressure on natural resources.
- Sustainable Development requires human development should balance with environmental concerns, reforms need to be made in the present socio-economic systems so as they remain harmonious in long term, example SDG goals.

Some Steps for sustainable Economic and Social Systems

- Agenda in UN-Habitat for making sustainable cities
- Lower dependence on fossil-based fuels and increasing renewable energy usage like solar based.
- Lowering wastage, waste-to-energy generation, Circular Economy approach etc.
- Reducing inequalities- income, gender etc. Participatory models for decision making by involving locals.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the India Climate Collaborative (ICC), consider the following statements:
 1. It is an initiative of NITI Aayog.
 2. It will be working to strengthen the climate community locally, build a climate narrative and drive solutions that will ensure both the natural world and people thrive.

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
2. What is 'Vyommitra', recently seen in news?

(a) **A half-humanoid by ISRO**
(b) Newly found Exoplanet
(c) Humanoid robot used in Kerala Police
(d) None of the above
3. With reference to the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR), consider the following statements:
 1. The revenue amount used to calculate the revenue share to be given by telecom operators to the Government is known as AGR.
 2. The revenue shared by telcos with the government goes into the consolidated fund of India.

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
4. Natrilba swarupiae, a new archaeon (a kind of microorganism) was recently discovered in:

(a) **Sambhar Lake**
(b) Wular Lake
(c) Lonar Lake
(d) Chilka Lake

5. With reference to the Khelo India Youth Games, consider the following statements:
 1. Its objective is to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
 2. It is organized by Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.
 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
6. Thai Amavasai, is observed in which of the following state?
 - (a) Kerala
 - (b) **Tamil Nadu**
 - (c) Andhra Pradesh
 - (d) Odisha
7. With reference to the National Voters' Day (NVD), consider the following statements:
 1. The 10th National Voters' Day (NVD) was being celebrated on January 22, 2020.
 2. The theme for NVD-2020 is 'Electoral Literacy for Stronger Democracy.'
 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
8. With reference to the criminalisation of politics, consider the following statements:
 1. Recently Supreme Court had directed political parties to publish online the pending criminal cases against their candidates.
 2. Election Commission (EC) has recently recommended to political parties to not give ticket to those with criminal antecedents.
 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
9. With reference to the IFSC Banking Units (IBUs), consider the following statements:
 1. Recently the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has notified IFSC Banking Units (IBUs) participation in Rupee exchange traded currency derivatives.
 2. An IBU is equivalent to an Overseas Branch for all practical purposes.
 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
10. With reference to the Padma Awards, consider the following statements:
 1. All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards.
 2. The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.
 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
11. India's first e-waste clinic opened in:
 - (a) **Bhopal**
 - (b) Guntur
 - (c) Surat
 - (d) Nagpur
12. India and which of the following country recently signed an agreement to upgrade the 50 km long road between Ashuganj river port and the Akhaura land port?
 - (a) **Bangladesh**
 - (b) Nepal
 - (c) Bhutan

- (d) Myanmar
13. With reference to the Jeevan Raksha Padak, consider the following statements:
1. Jeevan Raksha Padak series of awards are given to a person for meritorious act of human nature in saving the life of a person.
 2. Persons of all walks of life are eligible for these awards.
- 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
14. With reference to the Tatrakshak Medals, consider the following statements:
1. The President of India has approved Tatrakshak Medals to the personnel of the Indian Coast Guard for their act of conspicuous gallantry/meritorious service on the occasion of Republic Day 2020.
 2. These awards are being given to the personnel of Indian Coast Guard on Republic Day and Independence Day every year, since January 26, 1990 onwards.
- 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
15. With reference to the reservations for persons with disabilities, consider the following statements:
1. Supreme court (SC) has affirmed 10% quota for disabled persons both in direct recruitment and in promotions in PSUs.
 2. In 2016 Rajeev Kumar Gupta's case, S.C granted reservation in promotion to disabled persons employed in Groups A and B in addition to Groups C and D in the public sector.
- 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
16. With reference to the Biorock, consider the following statements:
1. Biorock is the name given to the substance formed by electro accumulation of minerals dissolved in seawater on steel structures that are lowered onto the sea bed and are connected to a power source.
 2. A biorock structure was installed one nautical mile off the Mithapur coast in the Gulf of Kutch on January 19.
- 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