

**NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION,
EMPOWERMENT****India's sedition law**

A charge sheet was recently filed against 10 people in a sedition case for allegedly raising “anti-national slogans” during an event on the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus in February 2016.

Charges of sedition- recent concerns:

- There have been many incidents in recent times where “misguided” people have been termed “anti-national”.
- Law enforcement agencies forget the fact that the sentiment could have been demonstrated through a slogan, a cheer, a statement, protest against a nuclear power project, or an innocuous post on social media. In all these cases, the state, across regimes, has filed charges of sedition.
- Authorities often forget the fact that sedition can't be applied to instances of criticism of the government or a political functionary. More importantly, words alone are not enough for such a charge to be slapped. Incitement to violence is the most crucial ingredient of the offence of sedition.
- Going through the numbers that the National Crime Records Bureau puts out every year, it is clear that despite the rise in sedition cases, convictions happen in barely a few. Even if these people are not convicted, the slapping of these charges is a way the governments over the years have been sending a strong message to its own people—obey or be ready to face consequences.

What is Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code?

Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life or any shorter term, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.

Why should it be scrapped?

Draconian laws such as the Section 124-A only serve to give a legal veneer to the regime's persecution of voices and movements against oppression by casting them as anti-national.

What has Supreme Court ruled?

The Supreme Court has persistently held that for the offence of sedition to be satisfied, there has to be a causal relationship between speech and acts of violence, and mere speech, regardless of how subversive it is, does not amount to sedition.

Short term measures to be put up in place:

- All speech-related offences should be made bailable offences; this would lessen the harmful impact of using arrest and custody as a way of harassing anyone exercising their rights under Article 19(1)(a).
- The offences should be made non-cognisable so that there is at least a judicial check on the police acting on the basis of politically motivated complaints.
- In the case of hate speech, it is important to raise the burden of proof on those who claim that their sentiments are hurt rather than accept them at face value. And finally, it is crucial that courts begin to take action against those who bring malicious complaints against speech acts.

Goa's 'Opinion Poll Day'

Goa celebrated its 52nd 'Asmitai Dis' (Identity Day) or Opinion Poll Day on January 16.

Significance of the day:

- It was on this date in 1967 that Goans voted against merging with Maharashtra and chose to remain a Union Territory. Though referred to as an 'opinion poll', the vote was in fact a plebiscite.

Background:

- Soon after Goa's liberation from colonial Portuguese rule in 1961, murmurs began of a merger with Maharashtra on grounds of cultural similarity and the argument that Konkani was a dialect of Marathi and not an independent language. With several Indian states having been

demarcated on a linguistic basis, the demand split the people of Goa into those who backed Konkani and wanted to remain independent of Maharashtra, and those who were in favour of Marathi and wanted to merge.

- In December 1966, Parliament passed the Goa, Daman and Diu (Opinion Poll Act), 1966, “to provide for the taking of an opinion poll to ascertain the wishes of the electors of Goa, Daman and Diu with regard to the future status thereof and for matters connected therewith”.
- Majority of votes went against the merger.
- Soon afterward began demands for statehood for Goa; however, it was only on May 30, 1987, that Goa became India’s 25th state. Daman and Diu continue to be Union Territories. Konkani was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution on August 20, 1992 (71st Amendment).

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Lokpal debate

The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act was passed in 2013, and no Lokpal has been appointed since, the Supreme Court has pressed the search committee to recommend potentials to the selection committee led by prime minister Narendra Modi by February 28.

Concerns raised: The fact that the government has delayed the appointment this long is surely problematic. Besides, a Supreme Court order to nudge the government to make any progress towards establishing the anti-graft institution is a poor commentary on its functioning.

Background: It has taken five years since the Lokpal Act, 2013, received the President’s assent on January 1, 2014, for a Search Committee to even begin its work. It was formed only on September 27, 2018, after Common Cause, an NGO, filed a contempt petition against the government over the delay in constituting the authority despite a Supreme Court verdict in April 2017.

Lokpal: As per Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, the appointments to Lokpal is made by high-level selection committee comprising of Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, Lok Sabha Speaker, the leader of the largest opposition party and an eminent jurist chosen by them.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND BILATERAL RELATIONS

Global Risks Report

The Global Risks Report 2019 has been released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Global Risks Report and its significance: Based on the work of the Global Risk Network, the report describes changes occurring in the global risks landscape from year to year and identifies global catastrophic risks.

The report explores the interconnectedness of risks, and is intended to raise awareness about the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to the mitigation of global risk.

Top 10 risks by likelihood as per the latest report:

- Extreme weather events.
- Failure of climate change mitigation and adaption.
- Major natural disasters.
- Massive incident of data fraud/theft.
- Large scale cyberattacks.
- Man-made environmental damage and disasters.
- Large-scale involuntary migration.
- Major biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.
- Water crises.
- Asset bubbles in a major economy.

Analysis of the report and key takeaways:

- Environmental risks dominate the global risks landscape in terms of impact and likelihood for the third year in a row. This includes extreme weather events and failure of climate mitigation and adaptation. Only 12 years left to stay beneath 1.5C. However, there is a lack of political will to set more stretching targets to cut emissions. The report finds that business leaders are more concerned about climate in the long term. This disconnect will need to be tackled.
- Global risks are intensifying, but our capacity to respond to them is declining. Power is moving towards more nationalist, authoritarian states and they are becoming more inwards-

looking. With greater geopolitical friction, our ability to cooperate to solve challenges such as cyber risks and climate change has become more challenging.

- Geopolitics and geo-economic factors, such as uncertainty and nationalism are fuelling risks. Innovation is also outpacing our ability to manage it and there are growing concerns around technology misuse.
- Shorter-term fears are around geopolitical and cyber threats. For top business leaders, cyber risk concern is rising globally and is the highest ranked threat. Other concerns also exist including fiscal crises, unemployment, energy price shocks, national governance failure, interstate conflict and natural disasters.
- There is a significant financing gap (US\$18 trillion) in infrastructure capital – with only US\$79 trillion currently planned between now and 2040. This means 20% more financing is needed than we are putting in today. Furthermore, infrastructure needs to be resilient to extreme weather events. Business, with its reliance on public sector infrastructure, will be impacted and need to work with government on solutions.

Palestine assumes chairmanship of G77:

Palestine has taken over the chairmanship of G77 from Egypt. The chairmanship of the G77 is based on the system of geographical rotation. 2019 was Asia's turn and the Asian group had unanimously endorsed Palestine. Egypt was representing the African Group of countries.

G77:

- The Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a coalition of 134 developing nations, designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations.
- G77 was formed on 15 June 1964 by the "Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Countries" issued at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- Since China participates in the G77 but does not consider itself to be a member, all official statements are issued in the name of The Group of 77 and China.

GOVERNANCE- SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC

Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)

The Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY), the flagship scheme of the Union Government for employment generation, crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries on January 14, 2019.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana:

- The scheme "Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana"(PMRPY) was announced in the Budget for 2016-17.
- The objective of the scheme is to promote employment generation.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- Under the scheme employers would be provided an incentive for enhancing employment by reimbursement of the 8.33% EPS contribution made by the employer in respect of new employment.
- The PMRPY scheme is targeted for workers earning wages upto Rs. 15,000/- per month.

Significance of the scheme:

- The employer is incentivised for increasing the employee base in the establishment through payment of EPF contribution of 12% of wage, which otherwise would have been borne by the employer.
- A large number of workers find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit of the scheme is that these workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G)

As per the latest study conducted by the Rural Development Ministry, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G) is in doldrums with over 12 lakh pending houses and land being provided to only 12 per cent of the beneficiaries even as the March 1 deadline for 1 crore houses fast approaches.

Performance analysis of the scheme:

- Of the total 4.72 lakh beneficiaries identified across the country, only 56,694 have been allotted land.
- Among the best performing states in terms of land allotment are Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- States like Goa, Kerala and West Bengal have drawn a blank in terms of allotment of land to beneficiaries.

PMAY- G:

- The erstwhile rural housing scheme Indira Awaas yojana (IAY) has been restructured into Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana –Gramin (PMAY-G) from 01.04.2016.
- PMAY-G aims at providing a pucca house, with basic amenities, to all houseless householder and those households living in kutcha and dilapidated house, by 2022.
- Cost sharing: The cost of unit assistance in this scheme is shared between Central and State Governments in the ratio 60:40 in plain areas and 90: 10 for North Eastern and Himalayan States.
- The scheme envisages training of Rural Masons with the objective of improving workmanship and quality of construction of houses while at the same time, increasing availability of skilled masons and enhancing employability of such masons.
- Selection of beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) is based on housing deprivation parameters of Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, subject to 13 point exclusion criteria, followed by Gram Sabha verification.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Angel Tax**

The government has notified changes to Section 56 of the Income Tax Act, in a move that brings relief to start-up founders and investors dealing with the issue of “Angel Tax”.

Major Changes introduced:

- As per the changes, all DIPP-recognised start-ups can apply to the department for approvals requesting exemption from Angel Tax, or Section 56 2 (viib) of the Income Tax Act, which will then be sent to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) for approval.
- The changes are applicable to start-ups, recognised by DIPP, where the amount of paid-up share capital, and share premium of the capital after the proposed issue of share does not exceed Rs. 10 crore.
- The notification specifies a list of documents that start-ups will have to submit to the DIPP while seeking approval. The CBDT is mandated to either approve or reject the applications within 45 days.

The Issue: At least 80 startups have received notices to pay angel tax since last year. Many founders have said they have been asked to pay up as much as 30% of their funding as tax. Angels have also received multiple notices asking them to furnish details on their source of income, their bank account statements and other financial data.

Agri-Vision 2019

Agri-Vision 2019, a two-day conference on ‘Envisioning Agro Solutions for Smart and Sustainable Agriculture’ was held at Hyderabad.

Indian Agriculture

- Agriculture sector accounts for 18 per cent of India’s GDP and provides employment to 50 per cent of the workforce of the country.
- The Gross Value Added by agriculture, forestry and fishing is estimated at Rs 17.67 trillion (US\$ 274.23 billion) in FY18.
- During 2017-18 crop year, food grain production is estimated at record 284.83 million tonnes.
- The introduction of high yielding varieties, irrigation facilities, increased input flow through fertilizers and pesticides, farm mechanization, credit facilities, price support, and other rural infrastructure facilities ushered the green revolution over the past few decades.
- Growth of Agricultural sector is important for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.
- Need for concerted efforts from all stake holders to find long term solution to various challenges faced by Agricultural sector, Loan waiver is only a temporary relief but proves futile in long run in addressing Farmers concerns

- India today is not only self-sufficient in respect of demand for food, but is also a net exporter of agri-products occupying seventh position globally. It is one of the top producers of cereals (wheat & rice), pulses, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and marine fish. However, we are still facing deficit of pulses and oilseeds. Although, the availability of fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and fish has increased, the most important aspect is to ensure access and affordability to a vast majority of Indians, including farmers.

Food processing industry

- Plays a critical role in improving agrarian economy, raising farm incomes, reducing wastages, ensuring value addition, promoting crop diversification and generating employment opportunities as well as export earnings.
- Vital link between agriculture and industry.
- The Indian food and grocery market is the world's sixth largest.
- The Indian food processing industry accounts for 32 per cent of the country's total food market, one of the largest industries in India.

Organic Farming

- India holds a unique position among 172 countries practicing organic agriculture.
- India is home to 30 per cent of the total organic producers in the world, but accounts for just 2.59 per cent (1.5 million hectares) of the total organic cultivation area of 57.8 million hectares.

Horticulture

- India is a leading horticultural country of the world with a total annual fruits and vegetable production of 306.82 million tonnes during 2017-18
- India is the second largest fruit producer in the world.

Livestock

- This subsector has been growing faster than crop sector.
- The contribution of livestock output to the total output of the agriculture sector has significantly increased from 15 per cent in 1981-82 to 29 per cent in 2015-16
- It acts as cushion and engine for agricultural growth.

Dairy industry

- India is also the world's second largest milk producer and is emerging as a major exporter now.
- It is contributing around 26 per cent to total agriculture GDP.

Challenges

- Climate change, fragmented land holding, increase in demand for food, stagnating farm incomes, declining productivity, diminishing and declining natural resources etc.
- Lack of favourable terms of trade, vagaries of monsoon, technology not reaching farmers in time, absence of proper marketing strategies etc.
- 85 per cent farmers are small and marginal with land holding of less than 2 hectares.
- Linking these small farmers with market is another major challenge in our system.
- To enhance the farmers' income, it is necessary to link them with marketers, traders and exporters.
- Challenges for food security in the 21st century is not only improving productivity but also yield stability through the development of crops which are disease-resistant, pest-resistant and adaptable to climate change.

Solution to address the challenges

- Some ways to address the issues – accord top priority to farmer-oriented marketing, providing adequate cold storage facilities and refrigerator vans, focusing on food processing through value addition, extending timely and affordable credit to farmers and ensuring that innovations and technologies reach the farmers, researchers and farm experts to come out with solutions to the multi-dimensional problems faced by the farming sector.
- United efforts by governments, scientific community, Krishi Vigyana Kendras and farmers to realize the ambitious goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

- Students pursuing agri courses must spend at least six months with farmers to have a first-hand understanding of the problems faced by the latter.
- Adopt the latest technologies from seeds to post harvest management to marketing and to improve productivity on par with the other leading nations.
- The use of Information Technology, Space Technology, Geo-Informatics, Internet of Things (IoT), Block Chain Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data Analytics and their first-mile connectivity to farmers is vital for enhancing farm incomes. Digital technologies can also help in countering vagaries in farming and optimising the resources.

Government initiatives

- Improve soil fertility on a sustainable basis through the soil health card scheme.
- Provide improved access to irrigation and enhanced water efficiency through Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY).
- Support organic farming through Paramparagat KrishiVikasYojana (PKVY).
- Creation of a unified national agriculture market to boost the income of farmers.
- To mitigate risk in agriculture sector, “Pradhan Mantri Fasal BimaYojana (PMFBY) has been launched for implementation from Kharif 2016.
- Focusing on irrigation with schemes like “Per Drop More Crop”, provision of quality seeds and nutrients based on soil health, setting up warehouses and cold chains to prevent post-harvest crop losses, promoting value addition through food processing, creating a National Farm Market, removing distortions and e-platform across 585 Stations.
- To achieve the target of doubling farmer income by 2022 increasing investments in agricultural R&D and rolling out efficient institutional reforms are vital to tackle the emerging challenges in agriculture, including food and nutrition security both at national and regional levels.

Small Farmers’ Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC):

Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Small Farmers’ Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC).

About SFAC:

- The Government established Small Farmers’ Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) as a Society in January 1994 to facilitate agri-business ventures by catalysing private investment through Venture Capital Assistance (VCA) Scheme in close association with financial institutions. The role of State SFACs is to aggressively promote agribusiness project development in their respective States.
- Management: The Society is governed by Board of Management which is chaired, ex-officio, by Hon’ble Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare as the President and the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, is the ex-officio Vice-President.

The main functions of SFAC are:

- Promotion of development of small agribusiness through VCA scheme.
- Helping formation and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) / Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs).
- Improving availability of working capital and development of business activities of FPOs/FPCs through Equity Grant and Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme.
- Implementation of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Electronic Trading platform.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Only 50 Great Indian Bustards left in the wild

The GIB’s last remnant wild population of about 50 in Jaisalmer district accounts for 95% of its total world population. No progress has been made on the proposal for establishing a captive breeding centre at Sorsan in Kota district and a hatchery in Jaisalmer for conservation of the State bird of Rajasthan.

Great Indian Bustard

- The Great Indian Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds, can weigh up to 15 kg and grow up to one metre in height.

- It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- For long, conservationists have been demanding to secure this population, warning that the bird might get extinct in the coming decades.
- It would become the first mega species to disappear from India after Cheetah in recent times.
- Till 1980s, about 1,500-2,000 Great Indian Bustards were spread throughout the western half of India, spanning eleven states.
- However, with rampant hunting and declining grasslands, their population dwindled.
- In July 2011, the bird was categorised as “critically endangered” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Protection Measures:

- Birdlife International uplisted this species from Endangered to Critically Endangered (2011)
- Protection under CITES Appendix I
- Protection under Schedule I Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002
- Project Great Indian Bustard (Rajasthan): aims at identifying and fencing off bustard breeding grounds in existing protected areas as well as provide secure breeding enclosures in areas outside protected areas

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

- The IUCN is the world’s oldest and largest global environmental organisation working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
- It was founded in 1948. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is a leading non-governmental authority on the environment and sustainable development. It is also involved in data gathering and analysis, research, field projects, advocacy, lobbying and education.
- IUCN is best known to the wider public for compiling and publishing the IUCN Red List, which assesses the conservation status of species worldwide.

MISCELLANEOUS

B.Tech course in AI by IIT Hyderabad: IIT Hyderabad has announced the launch of a full-fledged bachelor’s programme in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. IIT Hyderabad has become the first institute in the country to launch full-fledged Bachelor’s programme in AI technology. IIT Hyderabad will be the third institute to globally to offer the B.Tech course in AI.

Mount Shindake: A volcano- Mt Shindake has erupted on Kuchinoerabu Island of Japan. Kuchinoerabu Island belongs to Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan. The entire island lies within the borders of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park.

Chowmahalla Palace: The restoration of the Chowmahalla Palace to its age-old grandeur has been completed. Chowmahalla Palace is a palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad state. It was the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty and was the official residence of the Nizams of Hyderabad while they ruled their state. The palace was built by Nizam Salabat Jung.