CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Zonal Councils

Union Home Minister, Amit Shah chaired the 24th meeting of the Western Zonal Council at Panaji (Goa). The meeting was also attended by Chief Ministers of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Administrator of the UTs of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

Five Zonal Councils:

- The five Zonal Councils - Western, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Central - were set up under the States Reorganization Act, 1956 to foster Inter-State co-operation and co-ordination among the States.
- The Zonal Councils are mandated to discuss and make recommendations on any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning, border disputes, linguistic minorities or inter-State transport etc.

Organisational Structure Of Zonal Councils:

- Chairman - The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- Vice Chairman - The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- Members- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
- Committees Of Zonal Councils: Each Zonal Council has set up a Standing Committee consisting of Chief Secretaries of the member States of their respective Zonal Councils. These Standing Committees meet from time to time to resolve the issues or to do necessary ground work for further meetings of the Zonal Councils.

North Eastern Council:

- The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya and (vii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils.
- Their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.
- The State of Sikkim has also been included in the North Eastern Council vide North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act, 2002.

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

San-Sadhan Hackathon: Divyang Accessible Toilets

The government has invited applications for its latest initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission, called the 'San-Sadhan' Hackathon, The initiative aims to ease lives of Divyangjan by making toilets smarter, more accessible, and easier to use.

It is being jointly Organized by :

- Ministry of Jal Shakti
- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
- Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- 91springboard.

The Objective of San-Sadhan Hackathon are:

- Affordable, compact, flexible to use & design and scalability to suit variable area requirements.
- Demands of different disabilities, geographies, age groups, genders and cultures have to be kept in mind.
- Specifically, issues of wheelchair users, amputees, visually impaired and conditionally disabled (person with fracture, pregnant women, lactating mothers, elderlies etc.) need to be addressed.

The solution could be developed for any one of the following categories:

- Rural Individual Use Toilet
- Rural Community Use Toilet
- Urban Individual Use Toilet

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- Urban Community Use Toilet

As per the 2011 census, 2.68 crore people in the country fall under the category of 'Divyangs'.

Free Medicine Scheme of Rajasthan

The flagship free medicine scheme of Rajasthan government has bagged 1st position amongst 16 states, in the monthly rankings issued by the National Health Mission (NHM).

About the Scheme

- Rajasthan Mukhyamantri Nishulk Dava Yojana was launched on 2nd October 2011, by the then Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.
- It had 2 components-
  o Free Medicines: To provide commonly-used essential medicines free of cost to patients visiting government healthcare institutions (introduced on 2nd October 2011), and
  o Free Tests: To provide free tests (introduced on 7th April 2013).
- For the successful implementation of the same, Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation Limited (RMSCL) was incorporated as a Public Limited Company.
- Since 2011, it has benefitted around 67 crore patients, and a record number of 712 medicines are covered under it.
- National Health Mission under its Free Drug Service Initiative, started giving rankings to the states, in order to encourage them to provide free drugs to their patients coming to public health facilities.
- The performance of the states was assessed by NHM on the basis of 10 parameters. A few of them are,
  o The stock of drugs,
  o Value of drugs about to expire, and
  o Effective compliance with the Drugs and Vaccine Distribution Management System (DVDMS), etc.
- The main aim of this initiative was to reduce out of pocket expenditure of patients suffering from cancer, heart and kidney-related diseases, and other severe ailments.
- This initiative of NHM is implemented by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in order to support the states.

Way Forward

- Rewarding the states will act as a catalyst for ensuring the inclusive accessibility and affordability of health care services to the most downtrodden and the poorest sections of our society.
- This will also promote the spirit of co-operative and competitive federalism, whereby other states can take the lead and follow similar successful initiatives.

Sabka Vishwas-Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme, 2019

The Sabka Vishwas-Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme, 2019, which was announced in the Union Budget 2019-20, has now been notified. It will be operationalized from 1st September 2019 and would continue till 31st December 2019.

About:

- Government expects the Scheme to be availed by large number of taxpayers for closing their pending disputes relating to legacy Service Tax and Central Excise cases that are now subsumed under GST so they can focus on GST.
- The two main components of the Scheme are dispute resolution and amnesty.
- The dispute resolution component is aimed at liquidating the legacy cases of Central Excise and Service Taxthat are subsumed in GST and are pending in litigation at various forums.
- The amnesty component of the Scheme offers an opportunity to the taxpayers to pay the outstanding tax and be free of any other consequence under the law.
- For all the cases pending in adjudication or appeal – in any forum - this Scheme offers a relief of 70% from the duty demand if it is Rs.50 lakhs or less and 50% if it is more than Rs. 50 lakhs.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Five Star Movement

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Recently, Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced his resignation on account of the collapse of coalition between his party Five Star Movement (M5S) and League party. League party withdrew its support by stating that its political goal was to challenge the European Union's fiscal rules.

Five Star Movement (M5S)

- M5S is a populist movement that was stared in 2009 as an internet-based group becoming one of the most voted-for parties in Italy.
- It was started by Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio through their social networking site, Meetup.com, to bring people together to campaign on local issues and then field candidates for elections.
- In 2013 it became the second-largest party and eventually coming to power in 2018.
- M5S marks the significance of the internet and social media that could spur a new kind of politics.
  - M5S used the internet to form a political party – one without organisation, money, ideology or headquarters.
  - Also, it adds a new dimension to populism.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Fiscal Stimulus

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a number of measures to boost growth.

Some of the steps announced are:

- Controversial surcharge on Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) to be withdrawn. But increased surcharge will apply to high net-worth individuals earning more than Rs. 2 crore a year.
- Violations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules will not be treated as criminal offences.
- The government also decided to front-load the Rs. 70,000 crore of capital infusion in public sector banks that was announced in the Budget, a move that is further aimed at increasing private investment by facilitating greater credit disbursal by the banks.
- The government had rescinded its ban on the purchase of new vehicles by its departments to replace old ones. Vehicles bought till March 31, 2020, will also be eligible for an additional 15% depreciation.
- To curb the discretionary powers of the tax authorities, from October 1, all notices and summons by the Income Tax Department would be generated by a centralised computer and would carry a unique code. Any notices not carrying these codes would be considered invalid.
- Public sector banks have also decided to increase their repo rate-linked loan offerings.
- Government has announced an additional Rs. 20,000 crore of liquidity to the housing finance companies, over and above the Rs. 10,000 crore earlier announced.

NDB to Tap Indian Offshore Market

Recently, the New Development Bank (NDB) in its efforts to raise capital has announced to tap into the Indian rupee offshore market.

- NDB which recently has received its first 'AAA' rating, is looking into the Indian rupee offshore market to raise resources after the Masala bonds market slowed down.
  - There has been a slowdown in Masala bond market due to the global slowdown and India's economic issues like IL&FS crisis.
- It is a significant move as this will strengthen gradual internationalization of the Indian Rupee.
- However, the offshore rupee market has its own issues.
  - The exchange rate in the two markets i.e. home and offshore, could be different leading to arbitrage opportunities and inefficiencies.
  - In fact, the price in one market could drive the price in another market.
  - This reduces the efficacy of central bank's monetary policy.
  - That's why the government had recently formed a Task Force on Offshore Rupee Markets under former Deputy Governor of the RBI, Usha Thorat.
  - The task force recommended expanding onshore currency markets, in a calibrated manner.

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o   This will enable foreign investors to hedge their currency risk and could incentivise greater participation in rupee-denominated bonds.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Big data to Mitigate the Impact of Disasters

According to the report by the UN's Asia-Pacific social agency, technological innovations like big data can better predict disasters in the Asia-Pacific region and help to reduce its impact.

- The report stated that, since 1970, natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region have killed two million people i.e. 59% of the global death toll.
- Rising global temperatures and climate change have increased the frequency and intensity of floods, cyclones and droughts in the region.
- Further, disasters also cause more damage in Asia and the Pacific, measured as a percentage of GDP, than the rest of the world, and this gap has been widening.
- In this context, technologies intervention caused by big data can help identify and locate those most at risk, to warn people ahead of a disaster, and deliver targeted relief afterwards.
- This data can come from a range of sources, including satellite imagery, drone videos, simulations, crowdsourcing, social media and global positioning systems.

Application of Big Data in Disaster Risk Reduction:

- There are four main phases of disaster management i.e. prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
- A Big Data-driven sensor network can help mitigate disaster in the following ways:
    o   Flood and cyclone forecasting now rely on computer simulations, machine learning can help predict the location and severity of floods.
    o   Sensor webs and the Internet of Things can enable efficient earthquake early-warning systems.
    o   Remote sensing via satellites and drones provide quick assessments of damage and people affected so that disaster response can be prioritized.
    o   Public data like India's digital ID system (Aadhar) can help deliver targeted benefits to millions of small and marginal farmers affected by drought.
- Big data applications have led to substantial reductions in mortalities and economic losses due to typhoons in the north and east Asia.

Big Data

- Big Data, broadly characterize data sets so large they cannot be stored and analysed by the traditional data storage and processing methods.
- It has three characteristics, referred to as the three V's – Volume, Velocity and Variety, that distinguish Big Data from other forms of data.
- The emergence of Big Data has primarily been, due to the decrease in the cost of sensory and mass digitization of systems and processes around the globe.

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

Sterile Insect Technique (Sit)

Bangladesh is studying the feasibility of applying Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) to control the dengue outbreak. A team of experts from WHO-FAO and IAEA arrived in Dhaka to discuss the feasibility of this technique.

About:

- Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) is a 'mosquito fights mosquito technique.'
- Under this, radiation sterilised male mosquitoes are released in areas with dengue causing female Aedes aegypti mosquitoes turning them infertile.
- This is an environmentally friendly method to control mosquitoes as no pesticide is used.
- This breakthrough technique has been tested successfully at two sites in Guangzhou in China.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Day by Day what you do is who you become.

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DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICES

Qns: Inter-State Council is the only constitutional body to deal with federal disputes in a comprehensive manner. Discuss.

Answer:

The Inter-State Council was set up under Article 263 of the Constitution of India by the President in 1990. Prime Minister is the head of the ISC and the composition includes

- Six Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers to be nominated by the Prime Minister
- Two Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers to he nominated by the Prime Minister as permanent invitees.
- Chief Ministers of all States
- Chief Ministers of Union territories having Legislative Assemblies
- Administrators of Union territories not having Legislative Assemblies
- Governors of States under President's Rule

The following issues, as far as may be expedient, may not be brought up before the Council

- Any issue which can be resolved by discussion at the official level or at the level of Ministers between the Central Government and the State Governments concerned.
- Any issue which has to be considered or dealt with by the National Development Council, the National Integration Council , the Finance Commission, the Planning Commission or such other body or authority of a like nature as may be set up from time to time to deal with specific subjects relating to Centre-State relations.
- Any issue which is currently under consideration or discussion in either House of Parliament or which is sub-judice.
- Any issue relating to a matter which, under the Constitution, is left or the decision of a specified authority other than the Central Government such as the Election Commission or the Supreme Court etc
- Any other issue the discussion of which may, in the opinion of the Chairman, create discord between the States or otherwise be against the public interest or against the interests of the sovereignty or integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign State or Public Order.
- Any issue which relates to the discharge of any duty or special responsibility of the Union under the provisions of the Constitution or any law of Parliament.
- The Council in its first meeting in 1990 had considered the recommendations made by the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations. Keeping in view the complexities of the issues involved and their wider implications, the Council set up a Subcommittee of the Council to examine the recommendations. The Council broadly endorsed the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission as finalised by the Sub-committee. The Inter-State Council decided to set up a Standing Committee for having continuous consultation and processing of all matters for consideration of the Inter-State Council. Accordingly the Standing Committee was set up in 1996.

The Inter-State Council held nine meetings so far and has taken important decisions on 171 of the 247 recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission. The last meeting 9th - was held in 2005 and discussed good governance. Some of the major decisions of the Council are a follows

- Approved the Alternative Scheme of Devolution of Share in Central Taxes to States
- The Council decided that on the subject of delay in State Bills referred for President's consideration, there should be time-bound clearance of Bills referred. Also, The Bills should not be reserved for President's consideration in a routine manner.
- Laid down norms for the use of Art.356
- Discussed residuary powers of taxation, Art.355
- In the 9th meet in 2005, discussed good governance.
- ISC is the only Constitutional body to deal with federal disputes in a comprehensive manner. Finance Commission deals with only financial matters in the federal field. Supreme Court adjudicates on federal matters (Art. 131). Inter state water disputes tribunals exclusively deal with only water disputes.

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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQ

1. With reference to 'San-Sadhan' Hackathon, which of the following statements is/are NOT correct?
   1. It is Government of India initiative under the Accessible India Campaign.
   2. It aims to ease the lives of Divyangan by making toilets smarter, more accessible, and easier to use.
   3. The initiative is being organized jointly by the Ministry Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Human Resource Management

   Select the correct answer using the code given below:
   (a) 1 only
   (b) 2 only
   (c) **1 and 3 only**
   (d) 2 and 3 only

2. Consider the following statements:
   1. Amazon Rainforests are large tropical rainforest occupying the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries in southern North America.
   2. Tropical forests are closed-canopy forests growing only within 28 degrees north of the equator.
   3. They are very wet places, receiving more than 200 cm rainfall per year, either seasonally or throughout the year.

   Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
   (a) 1 only
   (b) 1 and 2 only
   (c) **3 only**
   (d) 1, 2 and 3

3. Who among the following is the Chairman of Zonal Councils in India?
   (a) **Union Home Minister**
   (b) Prime Minister
   (c) Chief Ministers of States by Rotation
   (d) Vice Chairman NITI Aayog

4. Consider the following statements:
   1. The Free Drug Service Initiative was launched by the NITI Aayog for giving rankings to the states, in order to encourage them to provide free drugs to their patients coming to public health facilities.
   2. The flagship free medicine scheme, Mukhyamantri Nishulk Dava Yojana has bagged the first position in the monthly rankings issued under Free Drug Service Initiative.
   3. Mukhyamantri Nishulk Dava Yojana was launched by the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in October 2011.

   Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
   (a) 1 only
   (b) **2 only**
   (c) 1 and 3 only
   (d) 1, 2 and 3

5. The scheme 'Sabka Vishwas', sometimes mentioned in the news is related to
   (a) **Legacy dispute resolution**
   (b) Confidence building measures in J&K
   (c) Communal harmony
   (d) Non-Performing Asset (NPA) resolution

6. Recently in news Five Star Movement is a/an
   (a) Revolution by Hoteliers
   (b) **Political Party**
   (c) International NGO
   (d) Environment Protection Movement

7. Sterile Insect Technique is used to prevent which of the following disease?
   (a) Malaria
   (b) **Dengue**
   (c) Plague
   (d) Cholera