

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**India-U.S 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**

India and USA have concluded several landmark agreements in both defence and Civilian sectors at the just concluded 2+2 Ministerial in Washington.

About:

- Industrial Security Annex (ISA): The Industrial Security Annex (ISA) to the India-U.S. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) will provide a framework for exchange and protection of classified military information between the U.S. and Indian defence industries.
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI): United States has announced its commitment to being the founding member of the CDRI whose headquarters will be located in India.
- Finalisation of Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): This will harmonise the two side's processes for identification, development and execution of projects under the DTTI.
- S&T Agreement: The new Science and Technology (S&T) Agreement concluded and implemented updates and replaces the 2005 Agreement and provides a framework for collaboration between the two countries in all fields of science, technology and innovation.
- The Young Innovators Internship Programme (YIIP): This Programme will create short-term internship opportunities in the U.S. for Indian students at post-secondary level or recent graduates, in key areas of scientific and economic endeavour.
- Tiger Triumph Exercise: It has been decided to hold the India-U.S. joint tri-services and amphibious exercise 'Tiger Triumph' on an annual basis. It was first held in November 2019 as a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise.
- Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA): Both countries have agreed to continue discussions on BECA. It will enable exchange of geo-spatial information between the two countries, enhancing the operational efficiency of the U.S. platforms currently being operated by India.
- MRO facilities in India: In line with GOI's efforts to build defence industry ecosystem in India, both countries have agreed to explore collaboration for establishment of Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities in India.

Related Info:

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will led the Indian side, while Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence represented the US at the meeting.
- The first 2+2 ministerial dialogue was held in New Delhi in September last year after the mechanism was approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump.

Centre Of Excellence For Next Generation Transportation Systems

The National Rail Transport Institute (NRTI) has signed an MoU with the University of Birmingham to set up its first Centre of Excellence for Next Generation Transportation Systems.

About:

- This Centre will be involved in promoting development of the Rail and Transportation sector in India which include training programmes for in-service professionals and undertaking joint research projects in areas such as signalling, communication, asset maintenance etc.
- Indian Railways is a founding partner of this centre.

National Rail Transport Institute (NRTI):

- The National Rail Transport Institute (NRTI) has been set up as a deemed to be university and has been operational since 2018.
- In addition to Schools and Departments in various disciplines, NRTI aims to develop interdisciplinary Centres of Excellence which would be collaborative constructs to promote research and education to the transportation sector.

Sharjah; Barjeel

The International Astronomical Union (IAU) announced that one of the newly discovered stars – HIP 79431 – was named as "Sharjah" and the planet affiliated with this star was named "Barjeel."

About:

- The Emirate of Sharjah is one of the emirates of the United Arab Emirates. It comprises the capital city of Sharjah, after which it is named. It is the only emirate that overlooks the coastline on the Persian Gulf to the west and the Gulf of Oman (Indian Ocean) to the East.

- A barajeel is a wind tower used to direct the flow of the wind so that air can be recirculated as a form of air conditioning

INDIAN ECONOMY

Goods And Services Tax (GST)

The 38th meeting of the GST Council was chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi.

Decisions taken during the meeting:

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has fixed a uniform tax rate of 28 % on both state-run and private lottery. It also decided to rationalise the GST rate on woven and non-woven bags to 18 %.
- The rates on the lottery and woven and non-woven bags will be effective from the 1st of March next year.
- The GST Council also decided to exempt upfront amount payable for long term lease of industrial and financial infrastructure plots by an entity having 20 % or more ownership of Central or State Government.
- It also recommended that Grievance Redressal Committees (GRC) will be constituted at Zonal/State level with both CGST and SGST officers and including representatives of trade and industry and other GST stakeholders (GST practitioners and GSTN etc.).
- The council also approved various amendments to laws which will be introduced in Union Budget 2020.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Health And Pollution

The Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) released The 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics: Global, Regional and Country Analysis report.

About:

- The report provides a ranking of pollution deaths on global, regional and country levels.
- It uses the most recent Global Burden of Disease data from the Institute of Health Metrics Evaluation.

Key findings:

- In 2017, pollution was responsible for 15% of all deaths globally, and 275 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years.
- India had most deaths — about 2.3 million — caused by pollution in 2017. India is followed by China in the number of pollution deaths, with about 1.8 million.
- Chad tops the list of countries with the most pollution-related deaths in proportion to their population, whereas India is at number 10 with 174 deaths for every 1,00,000 people.

Houbara Bustard

The government of Pakistan has issued special permits to the Emir of Qatar and nine other members of the royal family to hunt the houbara bustard, an internationally protected bird species.

About:

- The houbara bustard, which lives in arid climates, comes in two distinct species as recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature,
 - one residing in North Africa (*Chlamydotis undulata*) and
 - the other in Asia (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*), commonly known as MacQueen's bustard.
- The population of the Asian houbara bustards extends from northeast Asia, across central Asia, the Middle East, and the Arabian Peninsula to reach the Sinai desert.
- According to the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC), roughly 33,000 Asian houbara bustards remain today.
- After breeding in the spring, the Asian bustards migrate south to spend the winter in Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula and nearby Southwest Asia. Some Asian houbara bustards live and breed in the southern part of their ranges including parts of Iran, Pakistan and Turkmenistan.
- It is listed as Vulnerable under IUCN Red List Status.

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

Intelligent Concrete Maturity Meter

The Construction Engineering Research Foundation (PCERF), a non-profit organisation based in Pune, has developed what it claims is the country's first indigenous Concrete Maturity Meter that determines the strength of concrete used in construction.

About:

- The device dubbed as the ‘Intelligent Concrete Maturity Meter’ can help in significantly reducing the margin of error in estimating the strength of a structure while cutting project costs as well.
- It will be available at 30% to 40% of the cost of the foreign maturity meter that is in use in the market.

Maturity Method (Construction):

- Maturity Method, a 30-year old proven Non-Destructive Testing method, is used to estimate the real-time and realistic strength development of in-place concrete.
- Considered as more reliable, the method is based on the principle that concrete strength is directly related to its hydration (temperature) and age (time).

Pinaka Missile System

DRDO successfully flight-tested Pinaka Missile System from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the Odisha coast.

About:

- The Pinaka, a multi-barrel rocket launch system has a maximum range of 40 km for Mark-I and 75 km for Mark-II variant, and can fire a salvo of 12 rockets in 44 seconds.
- It has been developed by various Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- The weapon system, mounted on a Tatra truck, is equipped with state-of-the-art guidance kit comprising an advanced navigation and control system. The Navigation system of the missile is also aided by the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS).

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

Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa announced the setting up of a Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize.

About:

- Portugal would launch the prize in order to promote Gandhi’s ideals. Every year, the prize would be inspired by Gandhi’s thoughts and quotes.
- The first edition of the prize would be dedicated to animal welfare. Gandhi had said “the greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated”.

National Committee for the Commemoration Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th Birth Anniversary:

- This was announced by him while attending the second meeting of the National Committee for the Commemoration Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th Birth Anniversary, chaired by President Ram Nath Kovind at Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- Portuguese Prime Minister is the only foreign Prime Minister to be a part of the committee.
- The committee includes Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his Cabinet colleagues and Chief Ministers, apart from Gandhians.

ODISHA DEVELOPMENT

Column: New Agriculture Policy And Challenges

Odisha government’s new agriculture policy, aptly named Samridhi (prosperity) as it focuses on enhancing farmers’ income and development of small and marginal cultivators to achieve sustainable and stable agricultural growth, is certain to face a number of challenges at the implementation stage.

The most formidable of these challenges will be inspiring confidence among the farmers with regard to the utility and honest execution of the policy which has received the cabinet’s nod at a time when the government has been forced to scale down financial assistance to the members of the farming community under KALIA, its flagship scheme for their welfare. This has substantially eroded their confidence in the state government which faced with a tight economic situation has now decided to seek relief through the PM Kisan yojana. The state farmers with reduced KALIA benefits will be compensated through the central scheme as they will be now be the beneficiaries of both.

This has, however, seriously dented the image of the state government which eversince the launch of KALIA had been touting it as the panacea for all the problems facing the farmers. It had been collecting accolades from economists most of whom had lauded the scheme which instead of taking the traditional route of waiving loans focussed more on making farmers self reliant.

But there was no denying the fact that the cash transfer to the accounts of the farmers was one of the biggest attractions of the scheme which fetched the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) handsome votes in the last elections. The government had then practically turned its back on the PM Kisan yojana and even

delayed sending the list of state farmers to the Centre. Keen to score political points it wanted to prove that KALIA was better than the central scheme and that the state government was competent enough to take care of Odisha's farming community.

The financial crunch, however, changed the situation and made the state government change its strategy. With its financial component slashed KALIA has lost some of its sheen and with that the government's image has taken a knock. So making farmers believe in the new agriculture policy will definitely be a challenge for the government.

Second and equally important is making policy work at the implementation level. As a document every policy looks attractive because it is couched in a language that makes it sound lofty. But problems begin when the government seeks to carry it out on the ground. It is there that it encounters the real challenges.

For example it is easy to talk about an inclusive policy that gives equal importance to all sections of farmers—big, small, marginal and even the landless. In Odisha we are also talking about giving sharecroppers their due even though there is still a lot of confusion with regard to their legal status. Farming community is vast and one of the most significant contributors to state's economy. But it is highly stratified which makes it extremely difficult to deal with their hopes and aspirations within the framework of any policy. Since the new policy is going to be put to test soon it would be interesting to see how it copes with the challenge of keeping this diverse community with a myriad problems united with the single aim of strengthening the state's economy.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: Do you agree that sometimes rules and laws become the basis for moral corruption in society? (GS-4)

Laws and rules are important in any society to maintain social justice and order. They act as guidance for the ethical conduct of people in society. However, too much dependence on laws and rules leads to moral corruption among the people. While committing an immoral act, a person tends to give excuses by pointing towards provisions of rules and laws which are too old and does not comply with present social norms.

People follow the law only to avoid punishment, which is not the rationale behind the law:

- They have an inherent nature of being selfish which leads to moral corruption. 'Man is selfish by nature'-Thomas Hobbes.
- Impact of crony capitalism, money-driven society, commercialization and materialism in the society.
- Weak enforcement of probity in public life.
- Lack of strong character in people.
- Too many old and rigid laws also provide ground to misuse of laws by the people in society.
- Colonial hangover, Mai-Baap culture. (2nd ARC)
- Centralization of power in the administration. (2nd ARC)

Suggestions

- Imbibe values in people for building character as a check on their behaviour.
- Changes in the laws and rules as per changing social norms and values of the forthcoming generations.
- Improving Checks and balances in society through the strengthening of social institutions.
- Promoting Ethical ecosystem or Ethical infrastructure which requires minimum standards of conduct from everyone in the society.

Conclusion: Conducts can be considered desirable even if they are not enforced by-laws and rules. Moreover, it is difficult to control the behaviour of every person in society even when laws are enacted.

Qns. Analyze with an example, the role of discretion in decision making. (GS-4)

The lines separating right from wrong or good from evil are not like the fine lines of geometry. They are broad and deep and permit exceptions. Conventional wisdom, thus, stipulates that the official on the spot alone is best equipped to decide how to achieve the objectives of the policy he/she is trying to implement.

The broad characteristics of discretion cover the following key aspects:

- Discretion embodies some leeway or freedom to independently judge or act.
- Administrative use of discretion also assumes possession of some wisdom and ability to carefully make adjustments of one's actions as circumstances dictate or require.
- Civil servants are considered as the backbone of administration as they perform important functions in the public sphere which requires wielding of immense powers with freedom and discretion to make decisions.

- The problem with discretionary powers lies in its widespread abuse. For eg., Use of discretionary power by T N Seshan who was Chief Election Commissioner enthused a new life in the Election Commission. On the other hand, the discretionary power has often been used by corrupt officials for their personal gain, for eg, an officer granting tender to a known person.
- Opportunities for corruption are greater in a system with excessive discretion in the hands of the officials, particularly at the street-level bureaucracy. Such tendencies can be minimized by reducing discretion and maximizing transparency in the system and introducing strict accountability for actions. The most successful anti-corruption reforms are those that seek to reduce discretionary benefits, which are controlled by public officials.

Conclusion

- It must also be accepted that the existing framework for maintaining and promoting the norms of 'right conduct' cannot be enforced through rigid mindless enforcement of laws and rules. It is all a question of striking the right balance. Within the civil services, there are formal, enforceable codes setting out norms of expected behaviour with 'sanctions' prescribed for unacceptable departures from such norms.
- Discretion is a tool only when properly used; like an axe, otherwise, it is a potential weapon for mayhem. When public administrators make use of their discretionary powers, it should be very reflective of the intentions of their departments/organizations and in essence that of the government.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics: Global, Regional and Country Analysis report released by Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP), consider the following statements:
 1. In 2017, pollution was responsible for 15% of all deaths globally, and 275 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years.
 2. India tops the list of countries with the most pollution-related deaths in proportion to their population.Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
2. With reference to the 38th meeting of the GST Council, consider the following statements:
 1. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has fixed a uniform tax rate of 28 % on both state-run and private lottery.
 2. It recommended that Grievance Redressal Committees (GRC) will be constituted at Zonal/State level.Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. Consider the following statements:
 1. The International Astronomical Union (IAU) recently announced that one of the newly discovered stars 'HIP 79431' was named as "Sharjah" and the planet affiliated with this star was named "Barjeel."
 2. The Emirate of Sharjah in U.A.E is the only emirate that overlooks the coastline on the Persian Gulf to the west and the Gulf of Oman (Indian Ocean) to the East.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. With reference to the Centre of Excellence for Next Generation Transportation Systems, consider the following statements:

1. The National Rail Transport Institute (NRTI) has recently signed an MoU with the University of Birmingham to set up its first Centre of Excellence for Next Generation Transportation Systems.
2. The National Rail Transport Institute (NRTI) has been set up as a deemed to be university and has been operational since 2018.

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
5. The Pinaka, a multi-barrel rocket launch system has a maximum range of:
- (a) 1000 km
 - (b) 100 km
 - (c) 750 km
 - (d) **None of the above**
6. With reference to the India and USA 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, consider the following statements:
1. It has been decided to hold the India-U.S. joint military exercise 'Tiger Triumph' on a biennial basis.
 2. The Industrial Security Annex (ISA) to the India-U.S. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) will provide a framework for exchange and protection of classified military information between the U.S. and Indian defence industries.
- 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
7. With reference to the Intelligent Concrete Maturity Meter, consider the following statements:
1. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has recently developed the country's first indigenous Concrete Maturity Meter that determines the strength of concrete used in construction.
 2. Maturity Method in construction is a 30-year old proven Non-Destructive Testing method, is used to estimate the real-time and realistic strength development of in-place concrete.
- 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. Which of the following country has recently announced the setting up of a Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize in order to promote Gandhi's ideals?
- (a) U.S.A
 - (b) Brazil
 - (c) **Portugal**
 - (d) France
9. With reference to the Houbara Bustard, consider the following statements:
1. The population of the Asian houbara bustards extends from northeast Asia, across central Asia, the Middle East, and the Arabian Peninsula to reach the Sinai desert.
 2. It is listed as Critically Endangered under IUCN Red List Status.
- 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