

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Aser 2019 'Early Years'**

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019 'Early Years' was released by NGO Pratham.

Key Highlights:

- At least 25% of school children in the four-eight age group do not have age-appropriate cognitive and numeracy skills.
- Just 37.4% of children below six are able to recognize at least letters and only 25.6% can do additions, according to the report. Similarly, only 34.8% of children in Class II can read a text meant for the level below. And at Class III, only 50.8% can read texts meant for their juniors two levels below.
- Permitting underage children into primary grades puts them at a learning disadvantage which is difficult to overcome. More than a quarter of Class 1 students in government schools are only 4 or 5 years old, younger than the recommended age.
- The government-run preschool system is losing out to private schools in terms of enrolment.
- A better education level among mothers can lead to better outcomes among children in preschools and early schools. Numeracy skills among Class III children of illiterate mothers are much lower than those whose mothers had studied till Class XI or above.
- More girls are enrolled in government institutions and more boys in private institutions.

About ASER:

- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a nation-wide household survey that provides data on children's schooling and learning for a representative sample of children across rural India.
- Children in the age group 3 to 16 are surveyed to find out their enrollment status in pre-school or school. Children in the age group 5 to 16 are assessed one-on-one to understand their basic reading and arithmetic abilities.
- Since 2016, ASER switched to an alternate-year cycle, where the 'basic' ASER described above is conducted every other year (2016, 2018, and next in 2020).
- In alternate years, ASER focuses on a different aspect of children's schooling and learning.
- In 2019, ASER aims to shine the spotlight on the early years, reporting on the schooling status for young children in the age group 4 to 8 across 26 districts in the country. The early years, defined globally as age 0-8, is the most important stage of development of the human brain.

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC**New Monsoon Dates**

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has revised the normal onset and withdrawal dates for the monsoon in some parts of the country from this year.

About:

- Present scenario: The four-month southwest monsoon season, which brings as much as 70 % of the country's annual rainfall, officially begins on June 1, with the onset over Kerala, and ends on September 30.
- Recent decision: Although the June 1 date for the onset of the monsoon on the Kerala coast is unlikely to be changed, the dates for onset in many other parts of the country are expected to be revised. Effectively, the monsoon is now expected to have later arrival and withdrawal dates in most parts of the country.
- Reason: The main reason for the revision in the normal dates is the changes in precipitation patterns that have been taking place over the last many years. In the last 13 years, for example, only once has the onset over the Kerala coast happened on June 1.
- Impact: The revisions will help the IMD track the monsoon better, and improve its "impact-based" forecasts. New dates will likely nudge farmers in some parts of the country to make slight adjustments in the time of sowing their crops.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Death Penalty In India, Annual Statistics Report 2019**

The fourth edition of The Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics was published by Project 39A at the National Law University (NLU), Delhi.

Key findings:

- Trial courts in India delivered 102 death sentences in 2019, over 60% fewer than the 162 death sentences passed in 2018.

- However, the proportion of death sentences imposed for murders involving sexual offences was at a four-year high in 2019 at 52.94% (54 out of 102 sentences).
- 2019 also saw the highest number of confirmations by High Courts in four years; 17 out of the 26 confirmations (65.38%) were in offences of murder involving sexual violence.
- The Supreme Court, primarily during the tenure of the previous Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, listed and heard 27 capital cases, the most in a year since 2001.
- One out of two sentences were for sexual violence-murder; in three out of four sexual violence-murder death sentences, children were the killer's victims.

Related Info:

- The National Law University, Delhi: It was established in 2008 under the National Law University Act, 2007 with the objective of imparting comprehensive and interdisciplinary legal education.

Project 39A:

- Project 39A is inspired by Article 39-A of the Indian Constitution, a provision that furthers equal justice and equal opportunity by removing economic and social barriers.
- Using empirical research, Project 39A aims to trigger new conversations on legal aid, torture, DNA forensics, mental health in prisons, and the death penalty.

Surya Prakash Committee

The merger of Rajya Sabha Television (RSTV) and Lok Sabha Television (LSTV) is in the final stages, with a six-member committee expected to submit a report by this month-end to Upper House Chairman and Lok Sabha Speaker. The final decision will be taken by them.

About:

- The committee, constituted in November 2019, is headed by Prasara Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash.
- Its mandate is "to work out the modalities and prepare the guidelines for pooling resources, manpower and technology for the merger of the two channels".
- Before the LSTV was launched in 2006, private television channels aired select Parliament proceedings. In 2011, RSTV was launched. Parliament is in session for close to 100 days in a year and thus for the remaining period there is really no need for two channels.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**Apna Urea – Sona Ugle**

The Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers launched the "APNA UREA - SonaUgle" brand of Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL).

About:

- Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL) is Joint Venture Company promoted by the three Maharatna Companies i.e. Coal India Limited (CIL), NTPC Limited (NTPC) and Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) as the lead promoters with FCIL and HFCL as other two partners.
- It was established in 2016.
- In 2016, Government of India had approved the revival of three sick Urea plants located at Gorakhpur, Sindri and Barauni, which have been undertaken by HURL.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**Interest Rate Futures (IRF) Contracts**

The Metropolitan Stock Exchange (MSE) has become the first bourse to get a regulatory approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to launch weekly interest rate futures (IRF) contracts.

About:

- Interest Rate Futures (IRFs) are futures contracts wherein the underlying financial instrument pays interest.
- In the Indian market, exchange traded IRFs are based on 6-year, 10-year and 13-year government bonds and 91-day government treasury bills.

Monthly versus weekly:

- Currently, both the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the BSE offer trading facilities in such instruments but the contracts have a monthly tenor.
- It is expected that weekly contracts would give market players an avenue to hedge their risk exposure in the short term, especially during events such as central bank policy reviews, growth data releases and certain global events that can have a bearing on the interest rates in the domestic market.

Telecommunication Consumers Education And Protection Fund (TCEPF)

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) said that telecom service providers will need to deposit all unclaimed money of consumers, including excess charges and security deposit, in the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF).

About:

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had notified the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund Regulations, 2007 which created the 'Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund.'
- Any amount charged in excess of the notified rates by telecom service providers, which they are not able to refund to the concerned subscribers, are credited into the fund.
- The income from the Fund is utilised to undertake programmes to educate consumers of the telecommunication services on the recommendation of a committee.

'Option In Goods' In Commodities

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) allowed stock exchanges to launch 'option in goods' in their commodity derivatives segment. This is in addition to 'options on commodity futures'. Norms for options on goods are liberal compared to those on options on futures.

About:

- The provision shall pave the way for launching options contracts in commodities based on underlying spot market price and settlement through compulsory delivery.
- For the first time, Indian commodity derivatives market will witness both European as well as American options, where as in securities market options are restricted to European style only.
- As of now commodity options are permitted based on futures of that commodity as underlying. This means that on expiry of options, it devolves in futures or every option trade if not squared off on expiry in futures.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**Exploratory Drilling Exempt From Environmental Clearance**

The Environment Ministry has exempted oil and gas firms, looking to conduct exploratory drilling, from seeking environmental clearance.

About:

- The clearance is for both on-shore and offshore drilling explorations.
- Until today, exploratory surveys have merited the highest level of environmental scrutiny — called category 'A'. This requires project proponents to prepare an environment impact assessment (EIA) plan, have it scrutinised by a Centrally constituted committee of experts and subject the proposal to a public hearing involving the locals of the proposed project site.
- The new amendments demote exploratory projects to the category of 'B2'. This means it will be conducted by the States concerned and will not require an EIA.
- Developing an offshore or onshore drilling site as a hydrocarbon block will, however, continue to merit a "category A" treatment.
- The move is part of a larger process of decentralisation by the Centre in that it seeks to farm more regulatory actions to State and local units. Environmentalists warn that this can mean lax oversight.

'Must Run' Status

An expert group reviewing the Indian Electricity Grid Code (IEGC) has asserted that renewable energy power plants shall be treated as "must run" and electricity from these plants shall not be curtailed for any commercial reasons.

About:

- A 'must run' status means that the concerned power plant has to supply electricity to the grid under all conditions.
- Wind, solar, wind-solar hybrid and hydro plants (in case of excess water leading to spillage) shall be treated as MUST RUN power plants and shall not be subjected to curtailment on account of merit order despatch or any other commercial consideration.

Background:

- Renewable players have raised concerns in recent months about rising instances of state power distribution companies unplugging their generating capacity from the grid and delaying payments.
- The unplugging, also called backing-down, stems from the poor financial status of discoms, because of which a number of them have started going back on their PPA commitments with solar and wind power producers.

- The renewable sector was previously accorded a 'must run' status in the 2010 IEGC, despite which states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have curtailed electricity from such sources.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**Yada Yada Virus**

Researchers who recently reported the discovery of a new virus conceded that the discovery wasn't a big deal, with new viruses being announced every day. Therefore, the researchers have named their discovery "Yada Yada virus" (YYV).

About:

- Yada Yada Virus (YYV) is an alphavirus, a group of viruses that the researchers described as small, single-stranded positive-sense RNA viruses (that) include species important to human and animal health and which are transmitted primarily by mosquitoes and (are) pathogenic in their vertebrate hosts.
- Unlike some other alphaviruses, Yada Yada does not pose a threat to human beings.
- The virus was detected in mosquitoes trapped in three locations in Victoria, Australia.

Related Info:

- YYV takes its name from 'The Yada Yada', an episode of the television sitcom Seinfeld, which aired on the American network NBC on April 24, 1997.
- Merriam-Webster says yada yada is "boring or empty talk", a way to recount words that are "too dull or predictable to be worth repeating". The Cambridge dictionary says yada yada is only "blah blah blah".

TrueNat

World Health Organisation (WHO) Global TB Programme has included an Indian Molecular assay TrueNat as initial test for TB and MDR-TB in view of its high diagnostic accuracy, in the rapid communication document.

About:

- The TrueNat TB test is a new molecular test that can diagnosis TB in one hour as well as testing for resistance to the drug rifampicin.
- The TrueNat test has been developed by the Indian firm MolBio Diagnostics Pvt Ltd Goa. It's development has been funded by Bigtec Labs, India.
- The test works by the rapid detection of TB bacteria using the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique. Any resistance to rifampicin (RR) is detected by doing a second RTPCR (Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction)
- Genexpert versus TruNat: The Genexpert machine is designed for larger volumes and needs a reliable electricity supply. The TrueNat machine is more of a point of care machine, which is not fully automated. It is designed for situations where there may not be electricity and where the need is for one test to be done at a time.

Drosophila

Pune hosted the fifth edition of the Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC5), which was organised in the country for the first time by the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER).

About:

- Drosophila is a genus of flies, belonging to the family Drosophilidae, whose members are often called "small fruit flies" or pomace flies, vinegar flies, or wine flies.
- One species of Drosophila in particular, *D. melanogaster*, has been heavily used in research in genetics and is a common model organism in developmental biology.
- Its genome is entirely sequenced and there is enormous information available about its biochemistry, physiology and behaviour.

Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC):

- This biennial conference aims to promote the interaction of Drosophila researchers in the Asia-Pacific region with their peers in the rest of the world.
- It will bring together scientists from all over the world who use the fruit fly, Drosophila, as a model organism to address basic and applied questions.
- The last four editions of this conference took place in Taipei, Seoul, Beijing and Osaka.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY**Department Of Military Affairs (DMA)**

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has approved the rules of business for the newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA), headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

About:

- The DMA is the fifth department in the MoD — the others being the Department of Defence, the Department of Defence Production, the Department of Defence Research and Development and the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare.
- The DMA, headed by Gen. Bipin Rawat, will have two Joint Secretaries, 13 Deputy Secretaries, 25 Under Secretaries and 22 Section officers.
- The Services have been brought under the ambit of the DMA, in addition to the Territorial Army and works relating to the three Services and procurement exclusive to the Services, except capital acquisitions. The training policy, most of the training establishments and cadre management of the Services would be under the purview of the DMA.
- The DMA's mandate includes promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services; facilitating a restructuring of the military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands, and promoting the use of indigenous equipment.
- The defence ministry has shifted administrative and revenue procurement matters of the armed services to the DMA, but any important matter related to defence policy will be dealt by the defence secretary.

Related Info: The orders have also specified that the secretariat of the high powered Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), which looks after large capital procurements, will be moved to the Department of Defence (DoD), in a change from the past when it functioned under the tri-services headquarters.

SN Dhingra Special Investigation Team (SIT)

Centre has accepted the recommendations of the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT), headed by retired Delhi High Court judge Justice SN Dhingra which probed 186 cases of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Key findings:

- Large-scale riots targeting members of the Sikh community had broken out in the national capital in the aftermath of the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. The violence had claimed 2,733 lives in Delhi alone.
- Trial judges handed out acquittals in a routine manner, failed to separate cases based on incidents and rejected testimonies of witnesses on grounds of delay of FIRs.
- In some riot-cum-murder cases, police clubbed hundreds of murders that took place at different locations and sent all accused together for trial. The report said this led to trials lingering for years as the accused would be absent on several dates.
- Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed Supreme Court that the Centre will take appropriate steps on the SIT recommendations.

ODISHA DEVELOPMENT**Dolphin Census Begins In Chilika, Bhitarkanika**

The annual headcount exercise of dolphins inhabiting along brackish water bodies of the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary and Chilika lake began..

- Official sources said, 18 teams comprising 133 officials have been engaged for the enumeration of Irrawaddy dolphins at Chilika, Asia's largest brackish water lagoon.
- The teams began the annual census at 6 am today. The exercise is being conducted by 10 teams at central Chilika while eight teams are carrying out the enumeration in the outer periphery of the lake using GPS sets, binoculars and rangefinder.
- Apart from Chilika, the annual headcount exercise of dolphins inhabiting along brackish water bodies of the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in Odisha also began today.
- Rajnagar Forest Range officer, Bikash Ranjan Das informed that the census is being carried out in five ranges- Rajnagar, Kanika, Mahakalpada, Gahirmatha and Kujanga areas under the division.
- The exercise is being conducted by nine teams along the water channels and sea mouth where dolphins are usually sighted.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. Examine the following quotation: "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried".- Winston Churchill

Ans:

Democracy is a form of government in which rulers are elected by the people in a free and fair elections, on universal adult franchise and governed on the basis of certain fundamental rules like a constitution.

Challenges to Democracy

- Frequent elections and incongruent political ideologies lead to unstable and weak governments e.g. 1990s phase of coalition politics in India lead to short term governments.
- Competitive politics and power play leads to low moral values e.g. crony capitalism: the case of 2G spectrum scandal, bureaucracy-politics-crime nexus.
- Democratic processes lead to delay in decision making e.g. long-drawn process at arriving on consensus on Climate Agenda in UNFCCC despite the pressing nature of the issue.
- Elected rulers may not take decision in the best interest of people, rather cater to their immediate political needs and advantages e.g. inequalities based on caste, class, gender etc.

Democracy as best alternative than other tried forms

- Democracy is more accountable than other governments to its people, responding to their needs, sensitivities e.g. Post-Independence India did not face any famine due to focus on food security while Communist China faced it in the late 1950s
- Rigorous consultation and discussions in a democracy help in better quality of decision making e.g. special status given to scheduled areas and North-East in Constitution of India reflecting their culture, while China trying to curtail freedoms in Hong-Kong and military-dictators doing same in African nations.
- Democracy allows for methods to deal with differences and conflicts e.g. protection to minorities and depressed classes in India, secular nature of Indian state, while in regimes like Nazi Germany propounding Fascist ideas followed racial segregation policy, similar was the case in Apartheid regime in South Africa.
- Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens. Freedom Rights allow one to develop to their fullest potential and be responsible for their own actions. This removes the potential of any violent fallout in case citizens are disaffected by the ruling government. For instances, the absence of any tool of protest in dictatorship regimes in Middle east led to Arab Spring and downfall of such regimes.
- Democracy allows for course corrections by allowing to rectify mistakes e.g. Indian PM apologizing to Sikh community for atrocities in the mid-1980s, Japanese PM doing same for atrocities in Manchuria and South Korea during world war. On the other hand, China continues to repress Tibetan, Uighur ethnicity.

Way Forward

- Thus, democracy may not be the best form of government but definitely better than others, as W. Churchill illustrated in the face of Nazi aggression and need to fight such an ideology. Need is for continuously improving upon lacunas and make it more inclusive e.g. Right to Education, Forest Rights Act, Electoral Reforms etc. in India.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the PNEUMOSIL, consider the following statements:
 1. It is a conjugate vaccine to help produce stronger immune response to a weak antigen.
 2. In 2017, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine was included in the under India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).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 Drosophila, consider the following statements:
 1. It is a genus of flies, belonging to the family Drosophilidae, whose members are often called "small fruit flies" or pomace flies, vinegar flies, or wine flies.
 2. Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC) is a biennial conference aims to promote the interaction of Drosophila researchers in the Asia-Pacific region with their peers in the rest of the world.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. With reference to the 'must run' status, consider the following statements:
1. It means that the concerned power plant has to supply electricity to the grid under all conditions.
 2. Only solar and hydro plants shall be treated as MUST RUN power plants.
- 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 TrueNat TB test, consider the following statements:
1. It is a new molecular test that can diagnosis TB in one hour as well as testing for resistance to the drug rifampicin.
 2. The test works by the rapid detection of TB bacteria using the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique.
- 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. With reference to the 'option in goods' in commodities, consider the following statements:
1. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has recently allowed stock exchanges to launch 'option in goods' in their commodity derivatives segment.
 2. For the first time, Indian commodity derivatives market will witness both European as well as American options, where as in securities market options are restricted to European style only.
- 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. With reference to the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF), consider the following statements:
1. Any amount charged in excess of the notified rates by telecom service providers, which they are not able to refund to the concerned subscribers, are credited into the fund.
 2. The income from the Fund is utilised to finance the losses of telecom companies.
- 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 "APNA UREA - SonaUgle", consider the following statements:
1. It is a brand of Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL).
 2. In 2001 Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL) was disinvested and taken over by Vedanta Resources.
- 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 are the departments in the Ministry of Defence (MoD)?
1. Department of Military Affairs
 2. Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare
 3. Department of Defence Research and Development
 4. Department of Space
- Select the correct answer using the code given below:
- (a) 1 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only

- (d) **1, 2 and 3 only**
9. With reference to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019 'Early Years', consider the following statements:
1. At least 25% of school children in the four-eight age group do not have age-appropriate cognitive and numeracy skills.
 2. According to the report, just 37.4% of children below six are able to recognize at least letters and only 25.6% can do additions.
- 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. Surya Prakash committee, recently seen in news, is related to:
- (a) **the merger of Rajya Sabha Television (RSTV) and Lok Sabha Television (LSTV)**
(b) assess the PPP in India and Tax Structure Reforms
(c) curb the malpractices in banks
(d) suggest the best technologies for Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan
11. With reference to the Yada Yada Virus (YYV), consider the following statements:
1. It is an alphavirus which poses severe threat to human beings.
 2. Recently the virus was detected in mosquitoes trapped in three locations in Victoria, Australia.
- 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
12. Justice SN Dhingra Special Investigation Team (SIT), recently seen in news, is related to:
- (a) **1984 anti-Sikh riots**
(b) Black Money
(c) 2002 Gujarat riots
(d) Anti-CAA Riots
13. With reference to the southwest monsoon, consider the following statements:
1. It brings as much as 70 % of the country's annual rainfall.
 2. It officially begins on June 1, with the onset over Kerala, and ends on September 30.
- 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 Interest Rate Futures (IRFs) contracts, consider the following statements:
1. Interest Rate Futures (IRFs) are futures contracts wherein the underlying financial instrument pays interest.
 2. In the Indian market, exchange traded IRFs are based on only 91-day government treasury bills.
- 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 exploratory drilling, consider the following statements:
1. The Environment Ministry has recently exempted oil and gas firms, looking to conduct exploratory drilling, from seeking environmental clearance.
 2. The new amendments demote exploratory projects to the category 'A'.
- 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