

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Central Institute Of Plastics Engineering And Technology (CIPET)**

Central Institute of Plastics Engineering and Technology (CIPET) will take up Research and Development initiatives in the areas of Health Care, like Manufacturing and Certifying PPE to deal with COVID-19 pandemic.

About:

- Central Institute of Plastics Engineering and Technology (CIPET) functions under the Ministry of Chemicals and fertilizers.
- It was established in 1968 by Government of India with the assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at Chennai.
- The main objective of setting up of the institute was to develop manpower in different disciplines of Plastics Engineering & Technology.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**Karnataka State Health Register**

In a first of its kind initiative in the Country, Karnataka government will soon launch a State Health Register project to maintain the health database of all its citizens.

About:

- The Karnataka State Health Register will be a robust and standardized health repository of all the citizens.
- This will not only help the government to provide better health care, but will also help efficient resource allocation, management and better implementation of various citizen centric schemes in the state.
- This project will be implemented first in Chikkaballapur district on experimental basis.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**Operation Warp Speed**

The US President Donald Trump's administration has launched a program called Operation Warp Speed.

About:

- Operation Warp Speed is a public-private partnership, initiated by the Federal Government of the United States, to facilitate and accelerate the development of COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.
- It is an interagency program that includes components of the Department of Health, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institutes of Health and private firms.

Montenegro

Less than two months after detecting its first infection, Montenegro is the first country in Europe to declare itself coronavirus-free.

About:

- Montenegro is a country of South and Southeast Europe on the coast of the Balkans.
- It borders Bosnia-Herzegovina to the northwest, Serbia to the northeast, Kosovo to the east, Albania to the southeast, the Adriatic Sea to the southwest, and Croatia to the west.
- Its capital is Podgorica.
- Montenegro is a founding member of the Union for the Mediterranean. It is also in the process of joining the European Union.
- The largest lake in Montenegro and the Balkans is Lake Scutari.

New Development Bank (NDB)

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attended the Special Board of Governors meeting of the New Development Bank (NDB) through video conferencing in New Delhi. The meeting also witnessed the election of Mr Marcos Troyjo from Brazil as the new President of the Developmental Bank.

About:

- The New Development Bank (NDB), formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, is a multilateral development bank established by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
- Location: The bank is headquartered in Shanghai, China. The first regional office of the NDB is in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- History: During the sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (2014), the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the New Development Bank (NDB). The Bank formally came into existence as a legal entity in 2015.
- Capital: The initial authorized capital of the bank is \$100 billion divided into 1 million shares having a par value of \$100,000 each.

Voting power:

- Bank's Articles of Agreement specify that all members of the United Nations could be members of the bank, however the share of the BRICS nations can never be less than 55% of voting power.
- The Agreement on the NDB specifies that the voting power of each member will be equal to the number of its subscribed shares in the capital stock of the bank.

Pak Da

Russia has now started constructing its first strategic stealth bomber, capable of delivering nuclear weapons, under the Perspective Aviation Complex for Long-Range Aviation (PAK DA) programme.

About:

- The strategic stealth bomber, the second 5th Generation combat aircraft from Russia after the Sukhoi Su-57 supersonic fighter, will eventually replace the current set of strategic bombers Tupolev Tu 22, Tu-95 and Tu-160.
- The PAK DA bomber will use the latest technologies and materials to reduce its radar signature, making it invisible to the enemy.
- The first test flight of the PAK DA bomber is likely to take place in late 2021 or early 2022. The bomber is expected to join the Russian Aerospace Force only by 2028 or 2029 after rigorous testing and development.
- The aircraft PAK DA, will compete with the U.S. B-2 strategic stealth bomber which entered service in 1997. China is also developing its own stealth bomber - the Xian H-20.

International Day Of UN Peacekeepers

International Day of UN Peacekeepers 2020 will be observed on May 29. The theme for this year's Day is "Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace" to help mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

About:

- Date of observance: May 29.
- Why may 29: The first UN peacekeeping mission was established on 29th May 1948, when the Security Council authorized the deployment of a small number of UN military observers to the Middle East.
- Objective of the day: To pay tribute to the invaluable contribution by the uniformed and civilian personnel and to honour more than 3,800 peacekeepers who have lost their lives while rendering peacekeeping services.

USA Offers Mediation Between India and China

Recently, the USA President has offered to mediate between India and China over the Indo-China border standoff. The offer has come in the backdrop of the ongoing standoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Background

- Currently, India and China faces standoff at least four points along the LAC, including Pangong Tso lake, Demchok and Galwan Valley in Ladakh and Naku La in Sikkim.
- The tensions between two countries escalated along the LAC after China ordered the military to scale up battle preparedness and asked it to resolutely defend the country's sovereignty.
 - Subsequently, India has also increased its presence on the boundary with China in North Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, along with Ladakh.
- So far, at least six rounds of talks have been held between Indian and Chinese military commanders in Ladakh on the ground but have failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Offer by USA:

- The USA President has informed both India and China that the United States is willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their raging border dispute.
- It is the first time that the USA made such an offer to India and China, referring to the LAC situation as a "raging border dispute".
 - In the past, the USA had offered to mediate between India and Pakistan over Kashmir but it was rejected by India. India had cleared its position stating that the issue can only be discussed bilaterally.
- The offer comes amid ongoing issues between the USA and China over the origin of Covid-19 and trade tensions between the two countries.
- Recently, the USA's National Security Adviser also said that the U.S. could impose sanctions on both Beijing and Hong Kong, if China were to go ahead and impose a national security law on Hong Kong.

China's Stand:

- China has cleared that both countries would resolve the standoff bilaterally. It has also stated that the situation at the border with India is "overall stable and controllable".

- It has also stated that India and China have good border related mechanisms and communication channels and any issue can be resolved through dialogue and consultation.

India's Stand:

- India has not given any official response to the USA's offer for mediation between India and China.
- But, in the past India has rejected all offers for third party mediation.
- India has been carrying out high level meetings to open diplomatic channels to resolve the issue peacefully.

Way Forward

- The differing accounts in national and international media of escalation and continuing stalemate has created uncertainty in the scenario.
- In the Wuhan and Mahabalipuram summits, both China and India had reaffirmed that they will make efforts to ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas.
- Both countries have resolved border issues peacefully in the past four decades which gives the hope that the tensions will subside soon.
- The peaceful resolution between India and China is essential for their own growth and development as well as for maintenance of global peace

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Heatwave

For the past five days, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra have been experiencing severe to very severe heatwave conditions with Churu in Rajasthan reporting 50 degrees on Tuesday.

About:

- Heatwaves occur over India between March and June.
- Meteorologists declare a heatwave event when the maximum (day) temperature for a location in the plains crosses 40 degrees Celsius. Over the hills, the threshold temperature is 30 degrees Celsius.
- When the day temperature jumps by 4 to 5 degrees above the normal maximum temperature of a location, it is declared as a heatwave.

Does all of India experience heatwave conditions:

- Heatwaves are common over the Core Heatwave Zone (CHZ) — Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, West Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, parts of Gangetic West Bengal, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. However, the regions in the extreme north, northeast and southwestern India are lesser prone to heatwaves.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

Working Mechanism For Consultation & Coordination On India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)

India and China have activated the "working mechanism" at the diplomatic level alongside the military-to-military conversation taking place at the field level to "dis-engage" and "de-escalate" the situation.

About:

- The "Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)" was established in January 2012 after border talks between then National Security Adviser (NSA) Shivshankar Menon and his Chinese counterpart Dai Bingguo.
- It is headed by joint secretary-level officials from both sides. They are entrusted to help the special representative for boundary talks, a position currently held by NSA Ajit Doval.
- These officials have had 14 meetings since 2012, the last one in July 2019, and meet more frequently than the special representatives.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: "Free and fair elections form the bedrock of a democratic country." In the light of the statement critically analyse the role of the election authorities in India.

Ans

Free and fair elections form the bedrock of a democratic country. In India, the constitution envisages an Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SEC) for every state to safeguard the free and fair election and grants them with certain constitutional safeguards to secure their independent functioning.

However, the recent removal of Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner via an ordinance route is an example encroaching upon the independence of the Constitutional body especially in the light of political accusations and vested interests. This development not only threatens institutional autonomy but also falls foul of the constitutional provisions. Though the Election Commission of India is facing issues of autonomy due to political interference, the situation at the level of state election commission is more grim.

Significance of Election Commission Institution

- It is the guardian of free and reasonable elections in India.

- It enforces the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) before every election to be followed by the different candidates and parties so that the decorum of the electoral process is maintained well.
- It creates awareness about the electoral process and electoral governance amongst stakeholders namely, voters, political parties, election functionaries, candidates and people at large; and to enhance and strengthen confidence and trust in the electoral system of this country.
- The Election Commission prescribes the limits of campaign expenditure by the candidates and parties and monitors the spending too.
- The body also mandates that the political parties submit their audited financial reports regularly.

Challenges With Functioning of Election Commission Institution

- **Lack of Autonomy:** Although the state election commission on many occasions tried to exercise its duties enshrined in the constitution of India, they struggled to assert their independence. For example:
 - In Maharashtra, SEC had asserted that he should have the power to hold elections to the offices of mayor, deputy mayor, sarpanch and deputy sarpanch.
 - On the contrary, he was arrested and sent to jail for two days in March 2008 after the Legislative Assembly found him guilty of breach of privilege in an alleged conflict over his jurisdiction and powers.
- **Lack of Safeguard for SEC:** Though the State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his/her office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court (Art 243K(2)), yet it has been diluted on many instances.
 - In the *Aparmita Prasad Singh vs. State of U.P.* (2007) the Allahabad High Court held that if the Governor has power to fix or prescribe tenure by rule, he also enjoys the power to amend the rule, either for extending the term of the tenure or reducing the same.
 - Once the prescribed tenure comes to end, the incumbent SEC must cease to hold office and this shall not amount to removal from office.
- **Non Uniform Service Conditions for SECs:** Article 243K(2) states that the tenure and appointment will be directed as per the law made by the state legislature and thus each SEC is governed by a separate state Act.
 - This gives power to states to amend rules unilaterally and even sometimes take ordinance routes to bypass legislative scrutiny like the recent example of Andhra Pradesh SEC.

Steps To Be Taken

- **Supreme Court Directive**
 - The state governments need to follow the guidelines given by the Supreme Court in *Kishan Singh Tomar vs Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad* case:
 - The provisions of Article 243K of the Constitution, which provides for setting up of SECs, are almost identical to those of Article 324 related to the ECI.
 - Also, the state governments should abide by orders of the SECs during the conduct of the panchayat and municipal elections, just like they follow the instructions of the EC during Assembly and Parliament polls.
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission Recommendation**
 - **Constitution of the State Election Commission:** The State Election Commissioner should be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of a collegium, comprising the Chief Minister, the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly.
 - An institutional mechanism should be created to bring the Election Commission of India and the SECs on a common platform for coordination, learning from each other's experiences and sharing of resources.
- **Law Commission 255th Report on Electoral Reforms**
 - It recommended, to add a new sub-clause to Article 324 of the Constitution to provide for a separate independent and permanent Secretariat for the ECI along the lines of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Secretariats under Article 98 of the Constitution.
 - Similar provisions can also be made for the State Election Commissions to ensure autonomy, and free and fair local body election.

Conclusion: Election commissions are one of the bulwarks of the democratic system in India and thus securing their institutional integrity is a task that falls on all three branches —executive, judiciary and legislature. The unwarranted interference by one organ of the state in the functioning of others should be discouraged to achieve a robust electoral system.