GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC

Hpakant

In Myanmar, at least 162 people have been killed in a landslide at a jade mine in northern Kachin province. Myanmar Fire Service Department said that 162 bodies have been recovered from the landslide in Hpakant, the centre of the world's biggest and most lucrative jade mining industry.

About:
- Hpakant is a rough and remote area in Kachin state, 950 kilometres north of Myanmar's biggest city, Yangon. It is located on the Uyu River.
- It is famous for its jade mines which produce the world's best quality jadeite.

Jade
- Jade refers to an ornamental mineral, mostly known for its green varieties.
- It can refer to either of two different minerals: nephrite, (a silicate of calcium and magnesium in the amphibole group of minerals), or jadeite, (a silicate of sodium and aluminium in the pyroxene group of minerals).

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Article 164 (1A)

Congress Party has alleged that the strength of the Council of Ministers in Madhya Pradesh exceeds the prescribed limit and is in violation of the Constitution-prescribed strength.

About:
- It alleged that the BJP government had violated Article 164 (1A) of the Constitution that prescribed, "The total number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in the Council of Ministers in a State shall not exceed 15% of the total number of members of the Legislative Assembly of that State."
- With an Assembly strength of 206, the strength of the Council of Ministers shouldn't have exceeded 30. The appointment of 34 Ministers, including Mr. Chouhan, is in violation of Constitutional rules.

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

Aatmanirbhar Bharat Innovation Challenge

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched Aatmanirbhar Bharat Innovation Challenge.

About:
- It is an initiative of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology along with Atal Innovation Mission. This challenge will be jointly hosted by the Government and members of the tech community to make it more holistic.
- It has been launched to identify the best Indian Apps that are already being used by citizens and have the potential to scale and become world class Apps in their respective categories.
- This will run in two tracks:
  - o Promotion of Existing Apps: Track one will work in mission mode for identifying good quality Apps for the leader-board and will be completed in around a month.
  - o Development of New Apps: Track two initiative will work to help create new champions in India by providing support in ideation, incubation, prototyping and roll out along with market access. This track will run for a longer course of a time.
- Track 1 is being launched in the following 8 broad categories: Office Productivity & Work from Home; Social Networking; E-Learning; Entertainment; Health & Wellness; Business including Agritech and Fin-tech; News; and Games.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Enrica Lexie Case

Government of India moved the Supreme Court seeking closure of judicial proceedings in India against two Italian marines after it accepted the ruling of Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Enrica Lexie case.

About:
- On 15 February 2012, two Indian fishermen (aboard the St. Antony) were killed off the coast of Kerala by two Italian marines – Salvatore Girone and Massimiliano Latorre – aboard the Italian-flagged commercial oil tanker MV Enrica Lexie.
- Shortly after the incident, the Indian Navy intercepted the MV Enrica Lexie and detained the two Italian marines. After having been detained in India with no formal charges for two and four years, respectively, the two marines were released and returned to Italy.

Recent judgement
- On 2 July 2020, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Hague recognized the functional immunity of the two Italian marines, noting that they were engaged in a mission on behalf of the Italian Government, and thus ruled that the process continue in Italy.
- As a result, Italy will resume its criminal investigation into the 'Enrica Lexie' case, while India "is required" to cease exercising its jurisdiction on the marines.
- However, Italy was required to find an agreement with India in order to compensate for the two deaths and for the physical and moral damages suffered by the crew members and the vessel.

Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)
- The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), established by treaty in 1899, is an intergovernmental organization located in The Hague, Netherlands.
- It is not a United Nations agency, but it is an official United Nations Observer.
- It is not a court in the traditional sense, but provides services of arbitral tribunal to resolve disputes that arise out of international agreements between member states, international organizations or private parties.

INDIAN ECONOMY

2017 International Comparison Program (ICP)

The World Bank has released new Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) for reference year 2017, under International Comparison Program (ICP), that adjust for differences in the cost of living across economies of the World. Globally 176 economies participated in 2017 cycle of ICP.

About:
- The International Comparison Program (ICP) is the largest worldwide data-collection initiative, under the guidance of UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), with the goal of producing PPPs which are vital for converting measures of economic activities to be comparable across economies.
- Along with the PPPs, the ICP also produces Price Level Indices (PLI) and other regionally comparable aggregates of GDP expenditure.
- India has participated in almost all ICP rounds since its inception in 1970. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is National Implementing Agency (NIA) for India, which has the responsibility of planning, coordinating and implementing national ICP activities.

Worldwide Status of India:
- The Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) of Indian Rupee per US$ at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) level is now 20.65 in 2017 from 15.55 in 2011.
- The Exchange Rate of US Dollar to Indian Rupee is now 65.12 from 46.67 during same period.
- The Price Level Index (PLI) – the ratio of a PPP to its corresponding market exchange rate, which is used to compare the price levels of economies – improved to 47.55 in 2017 from 42.99 in 2011.
- In 2017, India retained its global position as the third largest economy, accounted for 6.7 % ($8,051 billion out of World total of $119,547 billion) of global GDP in terms of PPPs as against China (16.4 %) and United States (16.3 %), respectively.
- India is also third largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in global Actual Individual Consumption and Global Gross Capital Formation.

Regional Status of India: Asia-Pacific Region
- In 2017, India retained its regional position, as the second-largest economy, accounted for 20.83 % of the regional GDP in terms of PPPs where China was at 50.76 % (first) and Indonesia at 7.49 % (third).
- India is also the second-largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in regional actual individual consumption and regional gross capital formation.

Balance of Payments (BoP) 2019-20

RBI published data on developments in India's Balance of Payments during 2019-20.

About:
- The Current Account Deficit (CAD) narrowed to 0.9 % of GDP in 2019-20 from 2.1 % in 2018-19 on the back of the trade deficit which shrank to US$ 157.5 billion in 2019-20 from US$ 180.3 billion in 2018-19.
- Net invisible receipts were higher in 2019-20 mainly due to increase in net services earnings and private transfer receipts.
- Net FDI inflows at US$ 43.0 billion in 2019-20 were higher than US$ 30.7 billion in 2018-19.

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- Portfolio investment increased by US$ 1.4 billion in 2019-20 as against an outflow of US$ 2.4 billion a year ago.
- In 2019-20, there was an accretion of US$ 59.5 billion to foreign exchange reserves (on a BoP basis). Foreign exchange reserves in nominal terms (including the valuation effects) increased by US$ 64.9 billion during 2019-20 as against a decline of US$ 11.7 billion in the preceding year.

Important Info :
- The current account balances, which represent the net of the country's export and imports of goods and services and also payments made to foreign investors or inflows from them, are considered as an important indicator of a country's external sector.

External Debt
RBI published data on India's External Debt as at the end of March 2020.
Key Highlights:
- At end-March 2020, India's external debt was placed at US$ 558.5 billion, recording an increase of US$ 15.4 billion over its level at end-March 2019.
- Commercial borrowings remained the largest component of external debt, with a share of 39.4 %, followed by non-resident deposits (23.4 %) and short-term trade credit (18.2 %).
- At end-March 2020, long-term debt (with original maturity of above one year) was placed at US$ 451.7 billion, recording an increase of US$ 17.0 billion over its level at end-March 2019.
- The share of short-term debt (with original maturity of up to one year) in total external debt declined to 19.1 % at end-March 2020 from 20.0 % at end-March 2019.
- US dollar denominated debt continued to be the largest component of India's external debt, with a share of 53.7 % at end-March 2020, followed by the Indian rupee (31.9 %), yen (5.6 %), SDR (4.5 %) and the euro (3.5 %).
- The borrower-wise classification shows that the outstanding debt of general government decreased, while that of non-government sector increased at end-March 2020.
- The share of outstanding debt of nonfinancial corporations in total external debt was the highest at 42.0 %, followed by deposit-taking corporations (except the central bank) (28.3 %), general government (18.1 %) and other financial corporations (7.5 %).
- The instrument-wise classification shows that the loans were the largest component of external debt, with a share of 34.8 %, followed by currency and deposits (24.0 %), trade credit and advances (18.7 %) and debt securities (17.4 %).
- Debt service (principal repayments plus interest payments) increased marginally to 6.5 % of current receipts at end-March 2020 as compared with 6.4 % at end-March 2019, reflecting higher interest payments on commercial borrowings and lower current receipts.

Private Sector In Railways
Indian Railways has launched the process of opening up train operations to private entities on 109 Origin Destination (OD) pairs of routes using 151 modern trains.
About:
- It has invited Request for Qualifications proposals, for scrutiny of vendor capabilities, from those who can bring modern trains for operations on existing rail infrastructure. The Railway Board has set a tentative schedule for private train operations, expected to begin in 2023 and in 12 clusters.
- The present invitation for private operators to submit qualification bids for 151 trains would be, in the assessment of the Railway Board, only for a fraction of the total train operations — 5% of the 2,800 Mail and Express services operated by Indian Railways.

Tejas trains
- Earlier, in 2019, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC), in which the government is the majority shareholder, was given pilot Tejas trains operations in the New Delhi-Lucknow, and Mumbai-Ahmedabad sectors. These were the first trains allowed to be run by a 'non-Railway' operator.
- The present move takes another step towards competing passenger train operations, bringing new-generation trains and attracting investments of an estimated ₹30,000 crore.

Bibek Debroy Committee
- In 2015, the expert panel chaired by Bibek Debroy constituted by the Ministry of Railways, recommended that the way forward for the railways was "liberalisation and not privatisation" in order to allow entry of new operators "to encourage growth and improve services."

Farmers' Producer Organizations (FPOS)

Union Agriculture Minister announced that rural sector will be transformed by constitution of 10,000 new Farmers' Producer Organizations (FPOs).

About:

- This is a produce cluster based scheme. The FPOs will be managed in such a way that these farmers get access to technological inputs, finances, and better markets and prices for their crops
- In the beginning, the minimum number of members in the FPOs will be 300 in the plains and 100 in the North-East and hilly areas. 15 % of the FPOs are to be constituted in aspirational districts, and will be formed on priority basis in scheduled tribal areas.
- All FPOs will be provided professional support and handholding for five years.
- This is a central scheme, whose total budget is Rs. 6,865 crores.
- It will be implemented through agencies like NABARD, SFAC and NCDC. There will be credit guarantee fund with NABARD and NCDC, under which suitable credit guarantee up to two crore rupees per FPO will be provided.

Background:

- In the Budget 2020-21, there is a proposal to adopt cluster approach for horticultural produce through "One district – One Product" scheme so as to give a fillip to value addition, marketing and exports.

Chambal Expressway

Union Minister for Road Transport reviewed the proposed Chambal Express Project with Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

About:

- The Rs. 8,200 crore Project passing through MP, UP and Rajasthan envisages connecting Bhind to Kota. The 'Expressway' will be 309 km long in Madhya Pradesh. It will connect the boundaries of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh via Sheopur, Morena and Bhind.
- It also will provide cross connectivity with Golden Quadrilateral's Delhi-Kolkata corridor, North-South Corridor, East-West Corridor and Delhi-Mumbai -Expressway.
- This route will be connected to the Golden Quadrilateral (Agra-Kanpur) route in Bhind, North-South Corridor in Morena and Delhi Mumbai Corridor in Rajasthan.
- It is expected that project may be completed in about 2 years after land acquisition.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Miyawaki Method

Union Environment Minister inaugurated a unique urban forest at the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in New Delhi.

About:

- This would be a dense urban forest with multiple tree layers including 12000 saplings of 59 indigenous species in another year or so.
- The Miyawaki method of forest creation is employed which could help in reducing the temperature by as much as 14 degree & increase the moisture by more than 40%.
- Recently on the occasion of World Environment Day, the government announced implementation of the Nagar van scheme to develop 200 Urban Forests across the country in next five years with a renewed focus on people's participation and collaboration between Forest Department, Municipal bodies, NGOs, Corporates and local citizens.

Miyawaki method of forest creation

- Miyawaki is a technique pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki (born 1928), that helps build dense, native forests. The approach is supposed to ensure that plant growth is 10 times faster and the resulting plantation is 30 times denser than usual.
- It involves planting dozens of native species in the same area, and becomes maintenance-free after the first three years.

Shivalik Forest

The Saharanpur Divisional Commissioner has sent a proposal to the Uttar Pradesh government to declare the Shivalik forest in the Saharanpur circle a tiger reserve.

About:

- If accepted, it would be the fourth tiger reserve in Uttar Pradesh after Amangarh in Bijnor, Pilibhit and Dudhwa in Lakhimpur-Kheri.

- The Shivalik forest constitutes the northern tip of the State and the 33,220-hectare-long corridor, located at the foothills of the Shivalik range, connects four States — Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. It will facilitate safe movement of tigers.

INTERNAL SECURITTY, DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Transgenders In Armed Forces

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) told the Union Home Ministry (MHA) that it is ready make its force "compatible" for the recruitment of transgender people as officers in their ranks.

About:
- The CRPF communication refers to the April 15, 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court declaring transgender people as the Third Gender. Following this, Parliament passed The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019.
- The CRPF is the second force, among the five asked for their views, which has given a positive response to MHA's question. Earlier, the BSF said that it is ready to make necessary changes in the force for helping transgender people to join the force at Assistant Commandant-level.

- Sources said these recruitment would be made in the general cadre, meaning they would get to operate in combat roles and will eventually rise to command formations at the border and in law and order duties.

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

Phobos

The Mars Colour Camera (MCC) onboard ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) has captured the image of Phobos.

About:
- Phobos is the closest and biggest moon of Mars.
- Phobos is nearing Mars at a rate of six feet every hundred years; at that rate, it will either crash into Mars in 50 million years or break up into a ring.
- Its most prominent feature is the 6-mile crater Stickney, its impact causing streak patterns across the moon's surface. Stickney, the largest crater on Phobos along with the other craters are also seen in the image captured by ISRO's MOM.
- Phobos is largely believed to be made up of carbonaceous chondrites.

ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM)
- In 2014, ISRO successfully placed the Mars Orbiter Mission spacecraft in orbit around the red planet, in its very first attempt, thus breaking into an elite club.
- The mission also known as Mangalyaan was initially meant to last six months, but subsequently ISRO had said it had enough fuel for it to last "many years."
- The Mars Orbiter has five scientific instruments - Lyman Alpha Photometer (LAP), Methane Sensor for Mars (MSM), Mars Exospheric Neutral Composition Analyser (MENCA), Mars Colour Camera (MCC) and Thermal Infrared Imaging Spectrometer (TIS).

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)

The Union Home Ministry designated nine more individuals as "terrorists" under the amended anti-terror law that was passed by Parliament last year. The nine persons declared terrorists are linked to separatist Khalistani groups that seek to establish a separate country for the Sikhs.

About:
- The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was enacted in 1967.
- The 2004 amendment was to ban organisations for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, were banned.
- The 2019 amendment gave the Home Ministry the power to designate individuals as terrorists.
- Earlier, in September 2019, the four individuals to be first designated as terrorists were JeM chief Masood Azhar, LeT's Hafiz Saeed, his deputy Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, who planned and executed the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts.

Debate
- The Opposition parties had raised concerns in Parliament that the 2019 amendment could be misused against political opponents and civil society activists.

- However Home Minister had said in Rajya Sabha that "it was important to identify terrorists and not just organisations". The designations are also in alignment with laws in European Union (EU) countries, the U.S.A., China, Israel and even Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. "India needs to address the challenge of engaging with modernity along with cultural preservation". Discuss. (150 words)

India with its long history and varied heritage is one of the societies deeply rooted in traditions.

Besides, India is also making perceptible strides towards becoming a modern nation.

Since independence, modernization of India has been an integral part of the national strategy.

Also, conscious and sustained efforts are being made for the overall development of India's economy, polity, social framework and cultural matrix.

Modernization signifies a transformation from rudimentary traditional values to modern rationalist traditional values. Thus, Modernity is not antithetical to Cultural preservation but a rational view of culture. So, achieving modernity should be the aim of society in order to thrive on modern and rational traditional values.

Challenges in engaging with modernity

- Lack of understanding about the concept of Modernity: One of the biggest challenges in engaging with modernity is lack of understanding about the concept of modernity among people.
  - They fail to understand that Modernization is not about leaving one's cultural practices. But opting for rational traditional practices/rituals.
- Challenge by fundamentalism: Religious fundamentalism and rudimentary religious practices is another big challenge to engaging with modernity.
  - Religious fundamentalism sometimes fails to promote rational thinking and adoption of rational cultural practices.
- Lack of inclusive modern education: Modern education has failed to reach every section of the society due to some structural obstacles, caste stratification or some negative elements of tradition or discriminatory attitudes of individuals in society.
- Low status of women: Although politically women enjoy equal rights in Indian society, their social condition is not very pleasant.
  - They are ill treated (issues such as Patriarchy, women's economic dependence on man still exist) and thus, it is one of the biggest challenges in achieving modernity.

Steps to be taken

- Need for social movement: Modernity does not amount to undermining our collective memories, our cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge systems.
  - Thus, people need to be made aware of this fact and motivate through social movements for building rational and modern thinking.
- Bridging the gender gap: There is a desperate need to bridge the gender gap in Indian social structure. Focus should be on increasing literacy and economic opportunity for women.
  - Modernity will usher in the Indian society when its women possess a modern rational view of culture and are not bound by rudimentary practices like Patriarchy.
- Focus on Human development: Modernity, further, implies the constant pursuit of improvement in human lives and of the pursuit of progress (social as well as economic).
  - Thus, focusing on overall human development will help in inculcating rationalistic attitude among individuals and societies.

Conclusion

- We have to understand that the tradition occurs as part of a chain while handling down from one generation not another. Thus, there is no clear division between tradition and modernity. What is modern for the present civilization would be traditional for the civilization that exists a few decades later.

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