

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC

Reservation For Disabled

The Supreme Court, in a significant decision, confirmed that persons with disabilities are also socially backward and entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education.

About:

- It upheld a 2012 judgment of the Delhi High Court in Anamol Bhandari (minor) through his father/Natural Guardian v. Delhi Technological University.
- In that, the High Court held that people suffering from disabilities are also socially backward, and are therefore, at the very least, entitled to the same benefits as given to the Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe candidates.

FAMILY PLANNING

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare chaired the virtual meeting on the occasion of World Population Day. He highlighted that the strategy of putting family planning at the core has helped to achieve remarkable results.

About:

- In the last decade alone, India's Crude Birth Rate (CBR) has reduced from 21.8 (SRS 2011) to 20 (SRS 2018) while the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined from 2.4 (SRS 2011) to 2.2 (SRS 2018).
- The teenage fertility has halved from 16 (NFHS III) to 7.9 (NFHS IV).
- These efforts have taken India closer to reaching the replacement fertility level of 2.1 and 25 out of 36 States/UTs have already achieved replacement level fertility.
- Use of contraceptives has helped in averting 5.5 crore unintended pregnancies, 1.1 crore total births, 18 lakh unsafe abortions and 30,000 maternal deaths in 2019 alone.
- About 50 percent of the country's population falls in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years.

Family Planning initiatives

- The major initiatives under Family Planning include Mission Parivar Vikas, Injectable Contraceptive MPA, Family Planning – Logistics Management Information System (LMIS), Family Planning Communications Campaign.
- The National Family Planning Program has introduced the Injectable Contraceptive in the public health system under the "Antara" program.

INDIA CYCLES4CHANGE CHALLENGE

The Smart Cities Mission opened the registration for India Cycles4Change Challenge on 10th July, 2020. The challenge was launched on 25th June, 2020 by Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

About:

- The Challenge aims to help cities connect with their citizens as well as experts to develop a unified vision to promote cycling.
- The Challenge is open to all cities under the Smart Cities Mission, capital cities of States/UTs, and all cities with a population of more than 5 lakh population.
- The Challenge will run in two stages.
 - Stage One will run until October where cities will focus on piloting quick interventions to promote cycling and developing a scale-up strategy.
 - In October 2020, 11 cities will be shortlisted and will receive Rs. 1 Crore award and guidance from national and international experts to further scale-up the initiatives in Stage Two, which will be held until May 2021.

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC

NEOWISE

The recently discovered comet called C/2020 F3, also known as NEOWISE after the NASA telescope that discovered it, will make its closest approach to the Earth on July 22. On the day, the comet, will be at a distance of 64 million miles while crossing Earth's outside orbit.

About:

- Comets or "dirty snowballs" are mostly made of dust, rocks and ice, the remnants from time the solar system was formed over 4.6 billion years ago.
- Comets can range in their width from a few miles to tens of miles wide.

- As they orbit closer to the sun, like in the case of C/2020 F3, they heat up and release debris of dust and gases that forms into a “glowing head” that can often be larger than a planet.
- The debris forms a tail that can stretch out to millions of miles. Each time a comet passes the sun, it loses some of its material and it will eventually disappear completely as a result.
- While there are millions of comets orbiting the sun, there are more than 3,650 known comets as of now, according to NASA.
- Comets may be occasionally pushed into orbits closer to the sun and the Earth’s neighbourhood due to forces of gravity of other planets.

TARNAH BRIDGE

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated six new bridges built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in the Jammu Division of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

About:

- Of the six bridges, four bridges are in Akhnoor sector and two in Jammu-Rajpura area.
- One of these bridges, Tarnah bridge, falls in Hiranagar area of Kathua district. The Tarnah bridge will connect more than two dozen border villages from border Chakra to Tehsil Hirnagar to Jammu-Kathua National highway.
- The bridge will also connect Gurdasspur district in Punjab with Jammu and will be an alternate highway.

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

ATL APP DEVELOPMENT MODULE

NITI Aayog’s Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has launched the ‘ATL App Development Module’ for school children all across the country.

About:

- The ATL App Development modules have been launched in collaboration with Indian homegrown start-up Plezmo.
- Objective of launching it is to hone the skills of school students and transforming them from App users to App makers in the times to come under AIM’s flagship Atal Tinkering Labs initiative.
- The ATL App Development module is an online course and is completely Free. Through 6 project-based learning modules and online mentoring sessions, young innovators can learn to build mobile Apps in various Indian languages and showcase their talent.

TIFAC

Union Science and Technology Minister released a white paper on “Focused Interventions for Make in India: Post COVID 19”. It has been prepared by Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC).

About:

- TIFAC is an autonomous organization set up in 1988 under the Department of Science & Technology.
- Its mandate is to look ahead in technology domain, assess the technology trajectories, and support innovation by networked actions in select areas of national importance.
- Present Chairman of TIFAC Governing Council is Dr. V. K. Saraswat.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

CHINA-IRAN TRADE AND MILITARY PARTNERSHIP

Iran and China have drafted a sweeping economic and security partnership.

About:

- The partnership would vastly expand Chinese presence in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and dozens of other projects. In exchange, China would receive a regular and heavily discounted supply of Iranian oil over the next 25 years.
- The document also describes deepening military cooperation, potentially giving China a foothold in a region that has been a strategic preoccupation of the United States for decades. It calls for joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing.

Comment:

- This would clear the way for billions of dollars of Chinese investments in energy and other sectors, undercutting the Donald Trump administration’s efforts to isolate the Iranian government because of its nuclear and military ambitions.

- It represents a major blow to the Trump administration's aggressive policy toward Iran since abandoning the nuclear deal reached in 2015 by President Barack Obama and the leaders of six other nations after two years of gruelling negotiations.

INDIA-BANGLADESH TRADE RELATIONS

For the first time the Indian Railways, loaded special Parcel train beyond the country borders to Benapole (in Bangladesh) with Dry Chillies from Reddipalem (in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh).

About:

- Guntur and its surrounding areas in the state of Andhra Pradesh are well known for Chillies cultivation.
- Earlier, the farmers and merchants in and around Guntur area have been transporting Dry Chillies by road to Bangladesh in small quantities and that was costing around Rs 7000 per tonne.
- But the cost per tonne for carrying by Special Parcel Express train is Rs. 4,608 and which is very cheap and economical as compared to Road transport.

INDIA-US TRADE RELATIONS

The US remained India's top trading partner for the second consecutive fiscal in 2019-20.

About:

- According to the data of the commerce ministry, in 2019-20, the bilateral trade between the US and India stood at \$ 88.75 billion as against \$87.96 billion in 2018-19.
- The US is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus. The trade gap between the countries has increased to \$17.42 billion in 2019-20 from \$ 16.86 billion in 2018-19.
- In 2018-19, the US first surpassed China to become India's top trading partner.
- The bilateral trade between India and China has dipped to \$81.87 billion in 2019-20 from \$87.08 billion in 2018-19. Trade deficit between the two neighbours have declined to \$48.66 billion in 2019-20 from \$53.57 billion in the previous fiscal.
- The data also showed that China was India's top trading partner since 2013-14 till 2017-18. Before China, UAE was the country's largest trading nation.

F-1 VISA

India has expressed concern over the possibility that F-1 visa students attending online-only classes in the US may lead to the return of large number of Indian students studying there.

About:

In the United States, the F visas are a type of non-immigrant student visa that allows foreigners to pursue education (academic studies and/or language training programs) in the United States.

Three types of F visa:

- F-1 visas are for full-time students.
- F-2 visas are for spouses and children of F-1 visa holders — these are technically called "dependents."
- F-3 visas are for "border commuters" who reside in their country of origin while attending school in the United States. F-3 visas are granted only to nationals of Mexico or Canada and these visa holders may study part- or full-time.

INDEPENDENT PANEL FOR PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE (IPPR)

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the initiation of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR) to evaluate the world's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

About:

- The Panel will be co-chaired by former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Prime Minister Clark leads the United Nations Development Programme and President Sirleaf is a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.
- Operating independently, they will choose other Panel members as well as members of an independent secretariat to provide support.
- At the historic 73rd World Health Assembly in May, Member States adopted a landmark resolution that called on WHO to initiate an independent and comprehensive evaluation of the lessons learned from the international health response to COVID-19.
- In May of next year, at the World Health Assembly, the panel will present its substantive report.

INDIAN ECONOMY**ASEAN PORTAL**

Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched Aatmanirbhar Skilled Employee-Employer Mapping (ASEEM) portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

About:

- ASEEM portal will provide employers a platform to assess the availability of skilled workforce and formulate their hiring plans.
- The portal will map details of workers based on regions and local industry demands and will bridge demand-supply gap of skilled workforce across sectors.
- The Artificial Intelligence-based platform will also provide real-time granular information by identifying relevant skilling requirements and employment prospects.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

OPHIOCORDYCEPS SINENSIS

The world's costliest fungus — *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* — also known as Himalayan Viagra, which sells in international markets for upwards of Rs 20 lakh per kg, has entered the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

About:

- The list has placed the fungus, known for its aphrodisiac and rejuvenation properties, in the 'vulnerable' category.
- Citing the reason for placing the fungus in the vulnerable category, IUCN said "its spread has declined by at least 30% over the past 15 years as a result of overharvesting."
- The fungus is also known as keeda jadi in Uttarakhand because of its caterpillar-like appearance.
- It is endemic to the Himalayan and Tibetan plateau and is found in China, Bhutan, Nepal and India. In India, it is primarily found in Uttarakhand in the higher reaches of districts like Pithoragarh and Chamoli.

ALL INDIA TIGER ESTIMATION 2018

The fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation 2018, results of which were declared to the nation on Global Tiger Day last year has entered the Guinness World Record for being the world's largest camera trap wildlife survey.

About:

- The citation at the Guinness World Record website reads- "The fourth iteration of the survey – conducted in 2018-19 - was the most comprehensive to date, in terms of both resource and data amassed.
- The All India Tiger Estimation done quadrennially is steered by the National Tiger Conservation Authority with technical backstopping from the Wildlife Institute of India and implemented by State Forest Departments and partners.
- The latest results of 2018 had shown that India now has an estimated 2967 tigers out of which 2461 individual tigers have been photo captured, a whopping 83 % of the tiger population, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the survey.
- With this number, India is home to nearly 75% of the global tiger population and has already fulfilled its resolve of doubling tiger numbers, made at St. Petersburg in 2010, much before the target year of 2022.

INTERNAL SECURITY, DISASTER MANAGEMENT

NATGRID

The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has signed an MoU with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to access the centralised online database on FIRs and stolen vehicles.

About:

- The MoU will give NATGRID access to the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) database, a platform that links around 14,000 police stations. All State police are mandated to file FIRs in the CCTNS.
- NATGRID seeks to become the one-stop destination for security and intelligence agencies to access database related to immigration entry and exit, banking and telephone details of a suspect on a "secured platform".
- The project First conceptualised in 2009 under then Home Minister P. Chidambaram, has got a renewed push under Home Minister Amit Shah. The project aims to go live by December 31.

- It will be a medium for at least 10 Central agencies such as the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing to access data on a secured platform. The data will be procured by NATGRID from 21 organisations such as the telecom, tax records, bank, immigration etc.

SASHI KANT AGARWAL COMMISSION

The Uttar Pradesh government announced that the killing of Vikas Dubey allegedly while trying to escape from police custody on July 10 will be probed by a single-member commission.

About:

- Retired Allahabad High Court judge Sashi Kant Agarwal will head the commission, which will be based out of Kanpur, and have two months to submit its report.
- The decision comes a day after a series of petitions were filed in the Supreme Court seeking an independent probe into the killing of Dubey and his associates by the police following the Bikru ambush.
- The commission will also investigate the Bikru ambush as well as all the cases of 'encounters' between the police and Dubey's associates. Eight policemen were killed in the ambush while five associates linked to Dubey were killed later by the police in alleged exchange of fire.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

AH-64E APACHE ATTACK HELICOPTERS

Boeing handed over the last of the five AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to the Indian Air Force (IAF), completing the contract for 22 Apaches. The Apaches were deployed at the Leh air base as part of the forward movement of assets, amid the stand-off with China in Ladakh.

About:

- The IAF inducted the first batch of Apaches in September 2019 and based them at Air Force Station, Pathankot, Punjab.
- India contracted 22 Apache helicopters and 15 Chinook helicopters from Boeing through the Foreign Military Sales programme of the U.S. government in September 2015 under a \$3 billion deal. During the India visit of President Donald Trump in February, India and the U.S. signed a deal for six additional Apaches for the Army.
- Boeing's joint venture in Hyderabad, Tata Boeing Aerospace Limited, has been producing aero-structures for the AH-64 Apache helicopter for both the U.S. Army and international customers.

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

JYOTSNA BHATT

Renowned ceramic artist Jyotsna Bhatt passes away after she suffered a stroke.

About:

- Jyotsna Bhatt (1940 – 11 July 2020) was an Indian ceramist and potter.
- She studied and later taught at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda for forty years.
- Apart from ceramics, she also experimented with stoneware and terracotta. In her ceramics, she preferred matte and satin matte glazes as well as teal blue to moss green and other earth tones. She frequently used alkaline earths, amorphous moulds and various minerals.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

8. Recently RBI announced a slew of measures to deal with the debilitating effects of the Covid induced lockdown. Delineate the measures along with their impact.

Answer

With a prolonged Covid induced lockdown, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), believes that the macroeconomic impact of the pandemic is turning out to be more severe than initially anticipated. Hence, the RBI has announced a set of steps to deal with the stress on various sectors of the economy.

- The MPC has reduced its key policy rates to stabilize the financial system. In doing so, the RBI panel unexpectedly cut the repo rate by 40 basis points to 4 per cent. Consequently, the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate have reduced to 4.25% from 4.65% and the reverse repo rate has reduced to 3.35% from 3.75%
- The RBI has cut the repo rate by a total of 115 bps since the lockdown began in late March. It also marks the eighth straight rate cut by the RBI.

Impact Of Rate Cut

- The rate cut will immediately result in retail loans becoming cheaper for borrowers whose EMIs are linked to the repo rate. These include home loans and other retail loans viz auto and personal loans.

- The marginal cost of lending rate (the benchmark for loans to corporates) of all banks will get revised next month, based on a formula and the interest rates on deposits are set to come down further due to the increase in banks deposits and the fall in credit demand.
- Further, the 40 bps cut in reverse repo rate — the interest rate that the RBI offers to banks for funds parked with the central bank — will prompt banks to make available funds for the productive sectors of the economy.
- This will help in correcting an imbalance wherein banks have been parking close to Rs 7-8 lakh crore at the RBI's reverse repo window instead of lending these funds.

Extension Of Moratorium On Loans

- The RBI has allowed lenders to extend an ongoing moratorium on loan repayment, which was due to end on May 31, by another three months to August 31. All borrowers, including home loan, term loans and credit card outstanding, will get the benefit of the moratorium.
- This will help borrowers, especially corporates which have halted production and are facing cash flow problems, to get more time to stabilize their operations and restart their units.
- Furthermore, the RBI has allowed borrowers and banks to convert the interest charges during the moratorium period (from March 1 to August 31) into a term loan which can be repaid by March 2021. This is expected to reduce the burden on borrowers who have gone for a moratorium.

Increased Exposure Limit Of Banks

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, debt markets and other capital market segments are witnessing increased uncertainty. As a result, many corporates are finding it difficult to raise funds from the capital market and are predominantly dependent on funding from banks.
- Thus, to facilitate the flow of funds to corporates, RBI has decided to increase bank's exposure to a group of connected companies from 25 % to 30 % of the eligible capital base of the bank.
- Under the existing guidelines on the Large Exposures Framework, the exposure of a bank to a group of connected counter-parties should not be higher than 25 per cent of the lender's eligible capital base at all times. The increased limit will be applicable up to June 30, 2021 and is expected to help banks meet the borrowing requirements of the private sector

Extension In Remittance Timeline

- Due to the Covid-19 related disruptions in cross-border trade, there has been a slowdown in manufacturing and sale of finished products and a delay in the payment, both domestically and overseas. This has led to an increase in the length of the operating cycle for business entities.
- Thus, the central bank has decided to extend the time period for completion of remittances against normal imports into India from 6 months to 12 months from the date of shipment for such imports made on or before July 31, 2020. However, the extension will not be applicable in cases where amounts are withheld due to guarantee of performance.
- The measure will help in providing greater flexibility to importers in managing their operating cycles in a COVID-19 environment.

Way Ahead

- Although, the RBI did not mention any specific figure on the growth rate, it expects the growth to be in the negative territory in 2020-21. Given the limited data from the National Statistical Office, the RBI could not forecast the inflation numbers, but it expects prices to increase in the first half due to supply-side issues and decrease in the second half of the year.
- The RBI has however assured that it will continue to monitor the situation and use all its instruments, along with coming up with new ones to mitigate its impact on the economic activity and the livelihood and health of the people.