

GOVERNANCE**Corporatization of OFB**

The Centre's move to corporatize the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has been strongly opposed by the trade unions

Key Points**OFB:**

- It is an umbrella body for the ordnance factories and related institutions, and is currently a subordinate office of the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- The first Indian ordnance factory was set up in the year 1712 by the Dutch Company as a GunPowder Factory, West Bengal.
- It is a conglomerate of 41 factories, 9 training Institutes, 3 regional marketing centres and 5 regional controllers of safety.
- Headquarters: Kolkata
- Significance: A major chunk of the weapon, ammunition and supplies for not just armed forces but also paramilitary and police forces comes from the OFB-run factories.
- Production includes: Civilian and military-grade arms and ammunition, explosives, propellants and chemicals for missile systems, military vehicles, armoured vehicles, optical devices, parachutes, support equipment, troop clothing and general store items.

Corporatization:

- In September 2020, an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) for Corporatization was constituted under the chairmanship of the Defence Minister.
- **Aim:** To oversee and guide the entire process, including transition support and redeployment plan of employees while safeguarding their wages and retirement benefits.
- The corporatization will result in the conversion of the OFB into (single or multiple) fully (100%) government-owned entities under the Companies Act, 2013 like other public sector undertakings.

Reasons for Corporatization:

- A performance evaluation by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its report for 2019 on the OFB highlights a few of the lacunae, which ails this organisation.
- Overheads (expenses not directly attributed to creating a product or service) constitute a staggering 33% of the overall allotted budget for the year.
- The major contributors being supervision costs and indirect labour costs.
- Delayed Production: The Ordnance factories achieved production targets for only 49% of the items.
- More than half the inventory (52%) was store-in-hand, procured for manufacture but not used within the year by the factories.
- The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, also calls for the Corporatisation of OFB for: 'improving autonomy, accountability and efficiency in ordnance suppliers'.

Apprehensions:

- One of the main apprehensions of the employees is that corporatisation (ownership and management lies with the government) would eventually lead to privatisation (transfer of ownership and management rights to the private player).
- The new corporate entities would not be able to survive the unique market environment of defence products that has very unstable demand and supply dynamics.
- Restructuring will result in greater autonomy and lesser government control over the corporation but there is a fear of job loss.

Way Forward

- The corporatisation of OFB is likely to transform ordnance factories into a modernised, state of the art facility with flexible and better decision making in its functioning.
- Currently the MoD has deferred the ongoing process till the talks with the unions protesting, reach to a meaningful conclusion. This is a welcome step.
- The broader consultation, on all the major concerns, is essential for sensitive issues like corporatization. Here, the need is to have a reflective road-map for the plan. This can help to ease the apprehensions regarding the corporatization.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**C-DAC's MOUs on Super Computing**

Recently, the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) has signed 13 MoUs with the premier academic and research and development (R&D) institutions of India.

Key Points

Aims behind the Move:

- To establish supercomputing infrastructure with assembly and manufacturing in India and critical components of the National Supercomputing Mission.
- Supercomputing has applications in so many areas like computational biology and chemistry, molecular dynamics, national security, big data analytics, government information systems, and so on.
- It becomes a powerful tool, paired with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), enabling it to empower people and make India ready to tackle future challenges.
- To develop India's indigenous hardware encompassing exascale chip design, design and manufacture of exascale server boards, exascale interconnects and storage including silicon-photonics at C-DAC to achieve complete self-reliance envisioned under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Initiative.
- Exascale computing refers to computing systems capable of calculating at least 10¹⁸ floating-point operations per second.
- Silicon photonics is an evolving technology in which data is transferred among computer chips by optical rays. Optical rays can carry far more data in less time than electrical conductors.

National Supercomputing Mission:

- It was announced in 2015, with an aim to connect national academic and R&D institutions with a grid of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities at an estimated cost of Rs. 4,500 crores over a period of seven years.
- It supports the government's vision of 'Digital India' and 'Make in India' initiatives.
- It is being implemented by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) through C-DAC and Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

The Mission envisages:

- To improve the number of supercomputers owned by India.
- To build a strong base of 20,000 skilled persons over a period of five years who will be equipped to handle the complexities of supercomputers.
- To empower Indian national academic and R&D institutions to spread over the country by installing a vast supercomputing grid comprising more than 70 high-performance computing (HPC) facilities.

India's Top 5 Super Computers

Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology India	Pratyush - Cray XC40, Xeon E5-2695v4 18C 2.1GHz, Aries interconnect Cray Inc.	4,006.2 TFlop/s
National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting India	Mihir - Cray XC40, Xeon E5-2695v4 18C 2.1GHz, Aries interconnect Cray Inc.	2,808.7 TFlop/s
Software Company (M) India	InC1 - Lenovo C1040, Xeon E5-2673v4 20C 2.3GHz, 40G Ethernet Lenovo	1,413.1 TFlop/s
Supercomputer Education and Research Centre (SERC), Indian Institute of Science India	SERC - Cray XC40, Xeon E5-2680v3 12C 2.5GHz, Aries interconnect Cray Inc.	1,244.2 TFlop/s
Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology India	iDataPlex DX360M4, Xeon E5-2670 8C 2.600GHz, Infiniband FDR IBM	790.7 TFlop/s

INDIAN POLITY**Gujrat's Disturbed Areas Act**

The President has given his assent to a Bill passed by the Gujarat Assembly in 2019, which made some amendments to the 'Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provisions of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act, 1991' - popularly known as the 'Disturbed Areas (DA) Act'.

Key Points**About the Act:**

- The Act was first introduced in Ahmedabad in 1986.
- At that time, due to large scale and continuous riots in Ahmedabad city, a number of areas started witnessing distress sale of properties mainly by people of a particular community.
- To check that, the then Gujarat government had brought in an ordinance. Later, it was converted into the DA Act in 1991.
- Under the DA Act, a District Collector can notify a particular area of a city or town as a "disturbed area". This notification is generally done based on the history of communal riots in the area.
- Following this notification, the transfer of immovable property in the disturbed area can take place only after the Collector expressly signs off on an application made by the buyer and the seller of the property.
- In the application, the seller has to attach an affidavit stating that she/he has sold the property of her/his free volition, and that she/he has got a fair market price.
- Violation of the Act's provisions, that is, if property in a notified disturbed area is transferred without the Collector's permission, invites imprisonment and a fine.
- The state government claims it is aiming to check communal polarisation of various parts of the state through the Act.
- The DA Act is applicable in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Himmatnagar, Godhra, Kapadvanj and Bharuch.

Reasons for Amendment:

- There were reports of anti-social elements selling and buying properties after either threatening people or luring them with higher prices, in areas marked as "disturbed".
- It was reported that at times, anti-social elements had got transfers done even without the Collector's prior permission by getting the transfer deed registered under the provisions of the Registration Act, in which the Collector's prior sanction under the DA Act was not required.
- This had resulted in clustering or polarisation of localities.
- To plug such loopholes, and to increase the punishment for the violation of the Act as deterrence, the amendment Bill was presented and passed in the Gujarat Assembly in July 2019.

Amendments:

- More Powers to the Collector: To ascertain if there is a likelihood of "polarisation" or "improper clustering" of persons belonging to a particular community, thus disturbing the demographic equilibrium in the area.
- For probing these aspects, the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has also been envisaged.
- Review Power to the State: The state government is authorised to review a decision taken by the Collector.
- Advisory Committee: Enables the state government to form an advisory committee that will advise it on various aspects of the DA Act, including adding new areas to the 'disturbed areas' list.
- Disturbed Area: The government can notify any area as a 'disturbed area' where it sees the possibility of a communal riot, or where it sees the possibility of a particular community's polarisation.

Strict Provisions:

- To check the registration of transfer of properties in disturbed areas without the Collector's prior approval, the amended Act has a provision to enlarge the scope of the term 'transfer', and include transfer of right, title or interest in or over such property in disturbed areas by way of sale, gift, exchange, and lease.
- The Act has amended the Registration Act under which no property in disturbed areas can be registered without prior sanction of the Collector.

- Redevelopment of the Property is allowed only if it is for the owner's purpose. But if the owner is planning to bring new people on the redeveloped property, she/he has to take the permission of the Collector.
- Non-Applicability: The provisions of the Act will not be applicable to the government's rehabilitation schemes in a disturbed area, where it resettles displaced people.
- Penal Provisions: The amendment has increased the punishment to imprisonment between three and five years. The fine has also been increased to Rs. 1 lakh, or 10% of the jantri rate (ready reckoner of property prices in different parts of the state) of the property, whichever is higher.
- The punishment for the violation of the Act was earlier imprisonment for six months and fine up to Rs.10,000.

ENVIRONMENT AND DIVERSITY

Increase In Human-Leopard Conflict

A study conducted across Karnataka indicates that the human-leopard policy guidelines have had little impact on the ground and it has not led to decrease in human-leopard conflict.

- The guidelines for human-leopard conflict management were brought out by the Government of India in April 2011 to reduce conflict with leopards, discourage their translocation, and suggest improved ways of handling emergency conflict situations.

Key Points

Findings of The Study:

- The number of leopards captured per month increased more than threefold (from 1.5 to 4.6) since 2011.
- Similarly, there was a threefold increase in the number of leopards translocated per month (from 1 to 3.5).
- Translocation is the managed movement of live indigenous plants or animals (taonga) from one location to another.
- Reasons for capture and translocation of leopards (in order of prominence)
- Livestock depredation (38.1%)
- Leopards rescued from snares and wells (15.7%),
- Anxiety caused owing to leopard sightings in human habitations (13.7%),
- Leopards entering human dwellings (10.9%),
- Human injuries (4.5%)
- Human deaths (2%)

Other Related News

- A recent study by TRAFFIC India on the seizure and mortality of 'common leopards' (*Panthera pardus fusca*) revealed that of the total of 747 leopard deaths between 2015-2019 in India, 596 were linked to illegal wildlife trade and activities related to poaching.
- The Government of India launched the First National Protocol on Snow Leopard Population Assessment in 2019, to mark the occasion of International Snow Leopard Day (23rd October).
- In 2014, a national census of leopards around tiger habitats was carried out in India except for the northeast. 7,910 individuals were estimated in surveyed areas and a national total of 12,000-14,000 estimated.

Common Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

- Habitat: It occurs in a wide range in sub-Saharan Africa, in small parts of Western and Central Asia, on the Indian subcontinent to Southeast and East Asia.
- The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) is a leopard widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent.
- Threats: Habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching for the illegal trade of skins and body parts, and persecution due to conflict situations

Conservation Status:

- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- CITES: Appendix I
- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India-Mexico

Recently, the 5th meeting of the India-Mexico Bilateral High-Level Group (BHLG) on Trade, Investment and Cooperation has been held through video conference.

- The 4th meeting of BHLG on Trade, Investment and Cooperation at the level of Commerce Secretary was held in Mexico City in July 2016.
- On 1st August 2020, India and Mexico celebrated the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

Key Points

- Both sides discussed a number of bilateral ongoing and outstanding issues, ranging from Audio-visual Co-production, Bilateral Investment Treaty, market access for agricultural products, a cooperation framework on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) measures, cooperation in the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and exploring ways to promote tourism and people-to-people contact.
- They also agreed to expand and diversify the bilateral trade relationship through enhanced cooperation in pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, healthcare, agro-products, fisheries, food processing and aerospace industry, etc.

Two Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) have been signed, to foster the cooperation in the domains of:

- Electronics, Computer Software and Telecommunications and Information Technologies.
- Foreign Trade, Investment and Technology.

India-Mexico Relations



Historical Ties:

- Being colonies in the past, India and Mexico have European connections of the colonial era.
- Mexico was the first Latin American country to recognise India after Independence and establish diplomatic relations with India in 1950.
- Mexican wheat varieties used in Indo-Mexican hybrids were the backbone of India’s Green Revolution in the 1960s.
- In the Cold War years, Mexico and India had worked together closely as members of the United Nations (UN), both actively championing the interests of developing countries such as in the Uruguay Round of Trade Negotiations (under the World Trade Organisation).
- Both countries are the members of G-20.
- Political and Bilateral Cooperation:
- Both countries established a ‘Privileged Partnership’ in 2007.
- In 2015, both countries agreed to work for achieving a ‘Strategic Partnership’.

- The two countries have several bilateral agreements and MoUs, including for Investment Promotion and Protection, Extradition, Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters, Space Cooperation, etc.
- India gives 20 scholarships to Mexico under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and Mexican diplomats are also given training at Forest Survey of India (FSI).

Economic and Commercial Relations:

- Mexico is currently India's largest trading partner in Latin America.
- In 2018-19, it accounted for almost a quarter of India's trade with the region. India is currently Mexico's ninth-most important global trading partner.
- The last decade has seen a spurt in trade between the two countries, which has grown from around USD 5 billion in 2015-16 to USD 9.4 billion in 2018-19.
- India's Exports: Vehicles and auto parts, organic chemicals, electrical machinery and electronic equipment, aluminium products, readymade garments, iron and steel products and gems and jewellery.
- India's Imports: Crude oil, electrical goods and machinery, organic chemicals, vehicles and auto parts and iron and steel.

Security:

- Both countries share a common concern over growing traditional and non-traditional security challenges, particularly the rise of global terrorism.
- Cultural Ties:
 - The Gurudev Tagore Indian Cultural Centre has been functioning in Mexico since October 2010, teaching Yoga, classical dances, music, etc.
 - An agreement on cultural cooperation has been in existence since 1975 and cooperation activities are carried out through four-yearly 'Programmes of Cultural Cooperation'.
- Indian Community:
 - The Indian community in Mexico is estimated to be more than 7,000, comprising mostly software engineers of Indian IT companies, academics/professors, and private businessmen.
 - Tourism between the two countries is steadily increasing and Mexicans have been extended the online e-Tourist Visa facility.
 - Indian nationals holding ordinary passports but having a valid visa for the USA, the UK, Canada, Schengen area or Japan, and holders of permanent residence in the same countries or Member States of Pacific Alliance viz. Colombia, Chile and Peru do not need a visa for short tourism or business visits to Mexico.

Differences:

- Mexico and India have had different viewpoints on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation. However, during Indian Prime Minister's 2016 visit, Mexico pledged support for India's bid to be part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- Both countries have differences on the issue of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms.
- Mexico has been a member of the United for Consensus (UfC) group/Coffee Club that, unlike India and the other Group of Four (G-4) members (Japan, Germany and Brazil), opposes the expansion of permanent membership in the UNSC.

Way Forward

- India and Mexico have striking similarities in geo-climatic conditions, biodiversity, physiognomy and people, cultural and family values. Both are heirs to a great civilizational heritage and contacts between them indicatively go back centuries.
- Both India and Mexico are non-permanent members of the Security Council for the period 2021-2022, which is a good opportunity to set aside their differences on global governance issues and work closely on areas of mutual interest.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM**AMRUT Mission**

Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh have been appreciated for the progress made under AMRUT Mission (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation).

- Both the states were also requested to initiate activities under the "Catch the Rain" campaign. The objective of this campaign is to conserve/harvest every drop of water.
- This campaign incorporates rainwater harvesting in all the structures of the cities.

Key Points**About the AMRUT Mission:**

- Launch: June 2015
- Concerned Ministry: Housing and Urban Affairs

Purpose:

- To ensure that every household has access to a tap with the assured supply of water and a sewerage connection.
- The Priority zone of the Mission is water supply followed by sewerage.
- To increase the amenity value of cities by developing greenery and well maintained open spaces (e.g. parks).
- To reduce pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport (e.g. walking and cycling).

Components:

- Capacity building, reform implementation, water supply, sewerage and septage management, storm water drainage, urban transport and development of green spaces and parks.
- The reforms aim at improving delivery of citizen services, bringing down the cost of delivery, improving financial health, augmenting resources and enhancing transparency. It also includes replacement of street lights with LED lights.
- Central Sponsored Scheme: Total outlay for AMRUT was Rs. 50,000 crores for five years from FY 2015-16 to FY 2019-20.
- Unable to meet set targets for urban renewal in 500 cities, the Centre has extended the mission period of AMRUT upto 31st March, 2021.

State Annual Action Plan (SAAP):

- AMRUT has made states equal partners in planning and implementation of projects by approval of SAAP once a year by MoHUA and states have to give project sanctions and approval at their end, therefore actualisation of cooperative federalism.
- Supervision: An Apex Committee (AC), chaired by the Secretary, MoHUA and comprising representatives of related Ministries and organisations supervises the Mission.

Status of AMRUT Mission in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh:

- Himachal Pradesh is ranked 15th and Uttarakhand 24th in AMRUT's National rankings (performance-based).
- Odisha topped the rankings.
- Both the States have implemented the Online Building Permission System (OBPS) in their Mission cities.
- OBPS is a part of 'Ease of Doing Business' and should be implemented in all the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) apart from Mission cities.
- The Credit Rating work has been completed in all Mission cities in the two States.
- Credit rating is an assessment of an ULB's ability to pay its financial obligations.
- Both the States were informed that the Ministry has developed a common Dashboard for all the Missions (e.g. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban, Smart Cities Mission) of the Ministry where information relating to all States/UT and cities would be available. The States/UT may use this facility for monitoring the progress.
- States were requested to update the details of Missions regularly so that the progress would be updated in the portal/dashboard. This data is used for monitoring, reviewing and assessment of monthly rankings on the progress among the states.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Discuss how recently passed labour codes can have a transformative impact on labour empowerment in India. Also, discuss the challenges associated with the codes. (250 words)

Ans.

Recently, the Parliament passed three labour codes — on industrial relations; occupational safety, health and working conditions; and social security — proposing to simplify the country's archaic labour laws and give impetus to economic activity without compromising with the workers' benefits.

- Along with the 'Code on Wages Act- 2019', these can significantly ease the conduct of business by amalgamating a plethora of Central and State laws on labour. These labour codes can have a transformative impact on labour relations in India.

Benefits of Labour Codes

- Consolidation and simplification of the Complex laws: The three Codes simplify labour laws by subsuming 25 central labour laws that have been on the table for at least 17 years.
- It will provide a big boost to industry & employment and will reduce multiplicity of definition and multiplicity of authority for businesses.
- Single Licensing Mechanism: The codes provide for a single licensing mechanism. It will give fillip to industries by ushering in substantive reform in the licensing mechanism. Currently, industries have to apply for their licence under different laws.
- Easier Dispute resolution: The codes also simplify archaic laws dealing with industrial disputes and revamp the adjudication process, which will pave the way for early resolution of disputes.
- Ease of Doing Business: According to the industry and some economists such reform shall boost investment and improve ease of doing business. It drastically reduces complexity and internal contradictions, increases flexibility & modernizes regulations on safety/working conditions
- Other benefits for Labour: The three codes will promote fixed term employment, reduce influence of trade unions and expand the social security net for informal sector workers.

Concerns with the Labour codes

- Promote arbitrary service conditions for workers: The codes provide the liberty to industrial establishments to hire and fire their employees at will.
- This move might enable companies to introduce arbitrary service conditions for workers.
- Free Hand to States: The central government has also attracted criticism that states have been given a free hand to exempt laws in violation of labour rights. However, the Union Labour Minister has said the labour issue is in the Concurrent list of the Constitution and therefore states have been given the flexibility to make changes as they wish.
- Affect Industrial Peace: Industrial Relation Code proposes that workers in factories will have to give a notice at least 14 days in advance to employers if they want to go on strike.
- However, earlier the Standing Committee on Labour had recommended against the expansion of the required notice period for strike beyond the public utility services like water, electricity, natural gas, telephone and other essential services.
- Further, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh has also opposed the Code, describing it as a clear attempt to diminish the role of trade unions.

Conclusion

- The Periodic Labour Force Survey observes that 71% of regular wage/salaried workers in the non-agriculture sector did not have a written contract, and 50% were without social security cover. The new laws, by simplifying compliance, should create an incentive for workforce formalisation.
- The new labour codes will help in increasing the pace of generating good quality jobs to cater to the growing workforce, their rising aspirations and to absorb out-migration of labour from agriculture. This way India can fully be able to capitalize on its inherent labour and skill cost and help a fast economic recovery especially post Covid-19.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Consider the following statements:

1. Aquaponics is a system that combines hydroponics and aquaculture within an open system.
2. There are two biological components in the aquaponics process.
3. Hydroponics is a method of growing plants in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) **3 only**
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

2. With reference to AMRUT Mission, consider the following statements:

1. The mission seeks urban renewal in 500 Indian cities.
2. It is a center sector scheme.
3. It comes under the aegis of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) **1 and 3 only**

d) 1, 2 and 3

3. Consider the following statements:

1. KIRAN is a toll-free helpline to provide support to people facing mental health concerns.
2. Manodarpan Initiative is an initiative of the Ministry of Education under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

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 Common Leopard, consider the following statements:

1. It is widely found on the Indian subcontinent only.
2. It is listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List.

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. Consider the following statements:

1. The opposition effect is the circumstance in which two celestial bodies appear in opposite directions in the sky.
2. The planets Venus and Mercury can never be in opposition to the Sun.

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



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