

**GOVERNANCE****Ayushman Sahakar Scheme**

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has launched Ayushman Sahakar, a scheme to assist cooperatives in creation of healthcare infrastructure in the country.

**Key Points**

- Formulated By: National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
- NCDC was set up under an Act of Parliament in 1963 for promotion and development of cooperatives.
- It functions under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- Recent initiatives include Sahakar Cooptube NCDC Channel (Youth-focussed), Sahakar Mitra (Internship Programme), etc.

**Features:**

- NCDC would extend term loans to prospective cooperatives to the tune of Rs.10,000 crore in the coming years.
- Any Cooperative Society with suitable provision in its byelaws to undertake healthcare related activities would be able to access the NCDC fund.
- The scheme covers establishment, modernization, expansion, repairs, renovation of hospital and healthcare and education infrastructure.
- NCDC assistance will flow either through the State Governments/ UT Administrations or directly to the eligible cooperatives.
- The scheme also provides working capital and margin money to meet operational requirements.
- Further, the scheme provides interest subvention of 1% to women majority cooperatives.

**Significance:**

- It has a comprehensive approach-hospitals, healthcare, medical education, nursing education, paramedical education, health insurance and holistic health systems such as AYUSH.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into focus the requirement of creation of more facilities.
- There are about 52 hospitals across the country run by cooperatives. They have cumulative bed strength of more than 5,000. The scheme would give a boost to provision of healthcare services by cooperatives.
- The scheme aligns itself with the focus of the National Health Policy, 2017, covering the health systems in all their dimensions- investments in health, organization of healthcare services, access to technologies, development of human resources, encouragement of medical pluralism, affordable health care to farmers etc.
- It is in line with the National Digital Health Mission and would bring transformation in rural areas.
- Cooperatives have a strong presence in rural areas, thus, cooperatives utilizing the scheme would revolutionize the way healthcare delivery takes place in rural areas.
- Cooperatives

**Definition:**

- According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

**Related Provisions of Indian Constitution:**

- The Constitution (97th Amendment) Act, 2011 added a new Part IXB right after Part IXA (Municipals) regarding the cooperatives working in India.
- The word “cooperatives” was added after “unions and associations” in Article 19(1)(c) under Part III of the Constitution. This enables all the citizens to form cooperatives by giving it the status of fundamental right of citizens.
- A new Article 43B was added in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) regarding the “promotion of cooperative societies”.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY****Heeng Cultivation Project in India**

Scientists at CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT), Palampur are on a mission to grow heeng (asafoetida) in the Indian Himalayas.

- IHBT is the only laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Himachal Pradesh.

**Key Points****Heeng:**

- It is a herbaceous plant of the umbelliferae family. It is a perennial plant whose oleo gum resin is extracted from its thick roots and rhizome. The plant stores most of its nutrients inside its deep fleshy roots.
- It is endemic to Iran and Afghanistan, which are also the main global suppliers of it. It is very popular in India and is used in cooking.
- Climatic Condition: It thrives in dry and cold desert conditions. The plant can withstand a maximum temperature between 35 and 40 degree, whereas during winters, it can survive in temperatures up to minus 4 degree.
- Regions with sandy soil, very little moisture and annual rainfall of not more than 200mm are considered conducive for heeng cultivation.
- During extreme weather, the plant can get dormant.
- Properties: It has medicinal properties, including relief for digestive, spasmodic and stomach disorders, asthma and bronchitis.
- The herb is used to help with painful or excessive bleeding during menstruation and premature labour.

**India's Heeng Cultivation Project:**

- Heeng is not cultivated in India. India imports about 1,200 tonnes of raw heeng worth Rs. 600 crore from Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.
- In 2017, IHBT approached the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) with an experimental project idea to cultivate heeng in the Indian Himalayas.
- In June 2020, the IHBT inked a Memorandum of Understanding with the agriculture ministry of Himachal Pradesh to jointly cultivate the heeng.
- The agriculture ministry has identified four locations in the Lahul-Spiti valley and has distributed heeng seeds to seven farmers in the region.
- However, the challenge for the scientists is that heeng seeds remain under a prolonged dormant phase and the rate of seed germination is just 1%.

**INDIAN ECONOMY****Economic Performance : India v. China**

According to the September 2020 Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, economic recovery after the lockdown has thrown up some paradoxes for India. However, China has recorded growth for the consecutive third quarter (July-September 2020).

CMIE is a leading business information company. It was established in 1976, primarily as an independent think tank.

**Key Points****Employment:**

- The CMIE data shows that there is a revival in employment amid a fall in labour force participation. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
- However, usually when more people find jobs a greater number should have come in looking for jobs.
- The unusual trend can be explained by a rural-urban disaggregation of the data. Rural India is seeing an increase in jobs due to post harvest activity whereas employment in urban India is decreasing.
- Also, better quality and higher paying jobs in urban areas are being lost and substituted by lower-paid rural jobs.
- This phenomenon points to the fact that a reversal of migration back to the cities is not happening to the extent that it should have.

**Inflation:**

- The supply side shock due to lockdown has led to an increase in headline inflation mainly driven by increase in food prices.
- Headline inflation is a measure of the total inflation within an economy, including commodities such as food and energy prices.
- However, the unexpected trend is the rise in core inflation i.e. non-food, non fuel inflation, that too during a period when growth is set to register a record contraction.

- Core inflation is the change in the costs of goods and services but does not include those from the food and energy sectors.
- Ideally, the collapse in demand due to lockdown should have triggered a drop in core inflation.

**Consumer Confidence:**

- Another unexpected development is evident in the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI)'s latest consumer confidence survey.
- The central bank's 'current situation index' fell to an all-time low in September, 2020 even as its 'forward-looking surveys' show that consumer confidence for the year 2020-21 has improved.
- Current situation index is a sub index that measures overall consumer sentiment regarding the present economic situation.
- So even as the current situation of households has been progressively worsening, the survey points to households reporting better prospects for the future.

**Growth:**

- According to the recent IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) report, Indian economy is going to be the worst affected among the comparative countries like China, U.S.A., Pakistan and Brazil.
- India is not only going to be worst-affected in the short term but also in the medium term.
- The IMF has also doubled the rate of Gross Domestic Production (GDP) contraction for India. However, globally the growth has become better.

**China's Economic Performance:**

- China's economic growth continued to gain momentum in the third quarter, with the GDP expanding 4.9% from a year earlier in the July-September, 2020 period.
- China is witnessing an increase in tourism; growth in industrial production and exports that has generated revenue and jobs for millions Chinese people. However, Consumption is yet to regain its normal vigour in China.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted that China's economy will expand by 1.9 % in 2020, making it the only major economy to register growth in a pandemic-hit year.
- The economic rebound follows China's broad return to normalcy in early months of 2020, following sweeping Covid-19 curbs including stringent lockdowns, extensive contact tracing, and restrictions on international travel through the first half of the year.

**ENVIRONMENT AND DIVERSITY****Skinks of India**

Recently, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) brought a study on skinks (a kind of lizard), titled Skinks of India.

**Key Points****Skinks:**

- With 1,602 species of skinks across the world, It is the largest family of lizards, having long bodies, relatively small or no legs, no pronounced neck and glossy scales.

- It is found around homes, garages, and open spaces such as sparks and school playgrounds, and around lakes.
- Skinks are non-venomous, highly alert, agile and fast moving and actively forage for a variety of insects and small invertebrates.
- They have a prominent role in maintaining ecosystems, however, not much is known about their breeding habits, and ecology because identification of the species can be confusing.
- In India skinks are found in all kinds of habitats in the country, from the Himalayas to the coasts and from dense forests to the deserts.

**The Study:**

- It gives a phylogenetic (evolutionary development) and bio-geographical analysis of distribution of these species in all the 11 bio-geographic zones of India.
- India is home to less than 4% of the skinks across the globe. 62 species of skinks are found in India and about 57% of them (33 species) are endemic.
- India is home to 16 genera of skinks, four of which are endemic. The four genera of skinks are:
- Sepsophis: Sepsophis punctatus is endemic to the northern part of Eastern Ghats
- Barkudia: They are limbless skinks found in the hills and coastal plains of the eastern coast.
- Barkudia insularis is believed to be found only in the Barkud Island in Chilka lake in Odisha.
- Barkudia melanosticta is endemic to Visakhapatnam.
- Kaestlea: They are also known as blue-tailed ground skinks and are endemic to the Western Ghats.
- Ristella: They are also known as Cat skinks and endemic to the southern part of Western Ghats.

**Zoological Survey of India**

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), a subordinate organization of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change was established in 1916.
- It is a national centre for faunistic survey and exploration of the resources leading to the advancement of knowledge on the exceptionally rich faunal diversity of the country.
- It has its headquarters at Kolkata and 16 regional stations located in different geographic locations of the country.

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**Australia to join Malabar Exercise**

Recently, Australia has agreed to join the Malabar Exercise on India's request. The exercise is scheduled to be held in November 2020.

**Malabar Exercise**

- It is an annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA which is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- It began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the USA in 1992 and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
- The Exercise is aimed to support free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and remain committed to a rules based international order.
- It is also aimed at interoperability with an emphasis on humanitarian assistance, surface war manoeuvres, anti-submarines warfare, counter-terror operations, gunnery training and aerial surveillance.

**Key Points**

**2020 Malabar Exercise:**

- The 2020 Exercise is expected to be held in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. In 2019, the exercise was conducted off the coast of Japan.
- Due to Covid-19 pandemic the exercise had been planned in a 'non-contact - at sea' format.
- Its objective is to enhance safety and security in the maritime domain.

**Australia's Inclusion:**

The issue of Australia's inclusion in Malabar had again come up for discussion at the Quad foreign ministers meet in Tokyo held in October 2020. Thereafter, India invited Australia to join the Exercise.

- Quad is the informal strategic dialogue between India, the USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.
- The move will bolster the ability of India, Australia, Japan and the United States to work together to uphold peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region.
- It is also expected to further lay the foundations for the eventual formalisation of the Quad grouping.

**Background:**

- Despite regular requests from Australia, India resisted issuing the invitation due to its concerns that the move would give the appearance of a 'quadrilateral military alliance' aimed at China.
- In 2017, Australia had requested for observer status in the Malabar Exercise.
- China has repeatedly expressed strong opposition to any expansion of the Malabar Exercise, which it sees as a multilateral naval construct designed to "counter and contain" it.
- However, the recent India-China tensions over the situation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) may have brought more flexibility to India's decision making process.
- Japan and the U.S.A also have been pressing India for Australia's inclusion in Malabar Exercise.

**Other Cooperation Between Quad Members:**

- India and Japan had signed a military logistics agreement in September, 2020.
- India has signed maritime information sharing agreements for Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) with Australia and Japan and a similar agreement is under discussion with the U.S.A.
- MDA is defined by the International Maritime Organization as the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of a country.
- India and U.S.A. are also stepping up efforts to conclude the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) ahead of the Indo-US 2+2 ministerial meeting on 26-27 October, 2020.
- BECA, a key military pact, will allow India to use U.S.A.'s geospatial intelligence and enhance accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- BECA is one of the four foundational military communication agreements between the two countries. The other three being GSOMIA, LEMOA, CISMOA.
- GSOMIA: General Security Of Military Information Agreement
- LEMOA: Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
- CISMOA: Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement
- Defence and Foreign ministers of the two countries will Participate at the 2+2 ministerial meeting.

**Way Forward**

As India seeks to increase cooperation with other countries in the maritime security domain, high-end military exercises like Malabar are key to enhancing maritime capabilities, building interoperability with its close partners, and demonstrating its collective resolve to support an open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The fast-tracking of work on BECA and the decision of the four Quad countries to participate in the Malabar Exercise are perceived to be a strategic signal to an aggressive China.

**IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM****Frontier Technologies Cloud Innovation Centre**

Recently, the NITI Aayog and Amazon Web Services (AWS) have announced the establishment of a Frontier Technologies Cloud Innovation Center (CIC), the first of its kind in India.

AWS is a subsidiary of Amazon, multinational tech and online-shopping giant.

It provides on-demand cloud computing platforms and Application Programming Interfaces (API) to individuals, companies, and governments, on a metered pay-as-you-go basis.

**Key Points**

- CIC is part of the AWS CIC Global Program, which provides an opportunity for government agencies, nonprofits and educational institutions, to come together on pressing challenges, apply design thinking, test new ideas, and access the technical expertise of AWS.
- Frontier Technologies CIC will identify and prioritise projects as well as collaborate with local leaders, including subject matter experts at the state and district levels, to solve critical challenges.
- Local enterprises, start-ups, researchers, and universities in India can experiment and build prototypes on AWS Cloud.
- It is aligned to the visions of Aatmanirbhar Bharat Mission and the Atal Innovation Mission.

**Aims of Frontier Technologies CIC:**

- To address societal challenges through digital innovation.
- To enable budding innovators and start-ups and help in piloting state-of-the-art, cloud-centric digital innovations by leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, etc.

- To identify and deploy leading-edge technologies to drive continuous innovation in delivering citizen services.

**DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns. “The skewed child sex ratio could upset the gains from a falling fertility rate in India.” In the light of the statement discuss the reasons and suggest solutions to address low child sex ratio. (250 words)**

**Ans.**

The recently released Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical report estimated that India’s Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was around 2.2 in the year 2018, which is close to the replacement rate of 2.1. However, on flip side it highlights the declining sex ratio at birth in India that has further got reduced from 906 in 2011 to 899 in 2018.

**Issues with lower child sex ratio:**

- Gender-imbalance: An adverse child sex ratio is also reflected in the distorted gender makeup of the entire population. According to World Bank, in 2031, India will have 936 females per 1,000 males, lower than the sex ratio in 1951 of 946 females per 1,000 males.
- Distortion in the Marriage System: Adverse ratio results in a gross imbalance in the number of men and women and its inevitable impact on marriage systems as well as other harms to women.

**Reasons For Skewed Sex Ratio**

- Gender Bias: According to information from the UNPFA, reasons for female infanticide include anti-female bias, as women are often seen as subservient to men, who often employ positions of power.
- Son Meta-Preference: In addition, parents believe they will be better taken care of in their old age by men, as men are perceived as the principal wage earners of the family.
- Social Practices: Parents of girls are usually expected to pay a dowry, which could be a massive expense, avoided by raising males.
- Counter Effect of Rise in Income: Contrary to popular perception, in India’s sex ratio at birth declined even as per capita income increased nearly 10 times over the last 65 years, according to an IndiaSpend analysis of government data.
- This could be because rising income, which results in increased literacy, makes it easier for families to access sex-selective procedures.

**Addressing Low Child Sex Ratio**

- Bringing Behavioural Change: Increasing female education and economic prosperity help to improve the ratio. In this pursuit, The government’s Beti-Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign has achieved remarkable success in bringing behavioural change in the society.
- Sensitizing Youth: There is an urgent need to reach young people for reproductive health education and services as well as to cultivate gender equity norms.
- Regarding the services of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) can be leveraged, especially in rural areas.
- Stringent Enforcement of Law: India must implement the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 more stringently and dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.
- In this context, the Drugs Technical Advisory Board decision to include ultrasound machines in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, is a step in the right direction.

**Conclusion**

Although India has created several impressive goals to reduce its population growth rates, it has a long way to go to achieve meaningful population policy which are not only based on quantitative control but qualitative control as well.

**DAILY QUIZ**

1. With reference to Heeng Cultivation, consider the following statements:

1. It is resin extracted from its plant roots.
2. It is endemic to Iran and Afghanistan.
3. It thrives in dry and cold desert conditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**d) 1, 2 and 3**

2. With reference to the Malabar Joint Exercise, consider the following statements:

1. Russia has agreed to join the Malabar Exercise on India's request.
2. The exercise is expected to be conducted in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

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 Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme, consider the following statements:

1. The MRPs of all fertilisers are decontrolled or fixed by the private.
2. It intends to increase the consumption of fertilizers so that the ratio of NPK fertilization is achieved.

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. Which of the following autonomous institutions are working under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)?

1. Wildlife Institute of India (Dehradun)
2. Centre for Environment Education (Ahmedabad)
3. Institute of Forest Management (Bhopal)

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

5. With reference to the Ayushman Sahakar scheme, consider the following statements:

1. It is launched to assist cooperatives in creation of healthcare infrastructure in the country.
2. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development will extend term loans to cooperatives.
3. The scheme provides interest subvention to women majority cooperatives.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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