

GOVERNANCE**Commission for Air Quality Management in the NCR**

Recently, the President of India has signed 'The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020'.

The Ordinance sets up a statutory authority - the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region (NCR) and Adjoining Areas.

Through the Ordinance, the Centre has also dissolved the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) for the NCR.

Key Points**Background:**

- The monitoring and management of air quality in the Delhi NCR region has been done by multiple bodies including the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the state pollution control boards, the state governments in the region, including Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and the EPCA.
- They, in turn are monitored by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), and the Supreme Court itself, which monitors air pollution as per the judgment in 'M C Mehta vs Union of India', 1988.
- EPCA is a Central Government constituted committee in the year 1998 for the National Capital Region in compliance with the Supreme Court order dated 7th January, 1998.
- The Ordinance seeks to create an overarching body to consolidate all monitoring bodies, and to bring them on one platform so that air quality management can be carried out in a more comprehensive, efficient, and time-bound manner.

Composition of the New Commission:

- The Commission will be headed by a full-time chairperson who has been a Secretary to the Government of India, or a Chief Secretary to a State government.
- The chairperson will hold the post for three years or until s/he attains the age of 70 years.
- It will have members from several Ministries as well as representatives from the stakeholder States.
- It will have experts from the CPCB, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Civil Society.

Powers:

- In matters of air pollution and air quality management, the Commission will supersede all existing bodies such as the CPCB, and even the state governments of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. It will have the powers to issue directions to the states.
- CPCB and its State branches have the powers to implement provisions of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 for air, water and land pollution. Their powers continue. However, in case of dispute or a clash of jurisdictions, the Commission's writ will prevail specific to matters concerning air pollution.
- The Commission will also coordinate efforts of state governments to curb air pollution, and will lay down the parameters of air quality for the region.
- It will have powers to restrict the setting up of industries in vulnerable areas, and will be able to conduct site inspections of industrial units.
- If its directions are contravened, the Commission will have the power to impose a fine of up to Rs. 1 crore and imprisonment of up to 5 years.

NGT's Role:

- Only the National Green Tribunal (NGT), and not civil courts, is authorised to hear cases where the Commission is involved.

EPCA vs New Commission

- Jurisdiction: The EPCA, which was set up in 1998, looked at the NCR; the purview of the new Commission extends to "adjoining areas as well".
- Statutory Status: EPCA was not a statutory body but drew legitimacy from the Supreme Court. It did have the authority to issue fines or directions and guidelines to the governments in other states.
- However, it had no state representatives, just two permanent members.
- The Commission, on the other hand, will have representation from the state. It is a permanent and statutory body.

Performance:

- Experts say that EPCA has failed miserably in cleaning the air even after being in force for more than 20 years.
- However, the key contributions of the EPCA include - the notification of the Graded Response Action Plan that lists out measures to be taken in case of worsening pollution, the construction of the Regional Rapid Transport System and early adoption of BS-VI fuel standards, among other measures.
- The new Commission's performance will be gauged by changes in the status quo when it comes to ground implementation and strict action on polluters.

Appreciation

- Jurisdiction: This Commission will specifically look at the Delhi NCR and adjoining areas only.
- Whereas, the mandate of the CPCB is to serve the whole country.
- Stubble Burning: A regulatory mechanism for stubble burning is being put into place for the first time.
- Coordination: Earlier, there was no single body, authority, Ministry or state which was empowered or dedicated to ensure coordination among stakeholder states.

Criticism**Overrepresentation of the Central Government:**

- The Commission has a large number of members from the central government, which has not gone down well with the states.
- States, on the other hand, will have just one member each.
- Concerns of States: States are not happy with the overarching powers being vested in the Commission.
- Political differences will also play a part in the functioning of the Commission.
- Dissolution of EPCA: By forming a new commission, the government has taken the issue of air pollution out of the purview of the judiciary. It has been said that new law is needed when the old one fails. The centre has not even tried implementing old laws fully.
- Not a air-shed based approach: According to some experts, the Commission is a lost opportunity to explicitly set the ground rules for an air-shed based approach — one that could have been deployed in polluted areas across the country.
- An air-shed is an area covered by a volume of air that has similar characteristics and is separated from other volumes of air by weather patterns or topography.

Way Forward

- Legal and regulatory changes to tackle public issues like air pollution, need a democratic conceptualisation.
- There is a need for the massive augmentation of intra-city public transport, and to move industries, power plants and other users away from polluting fuels like coal to natural gas, electricity and renewable energy to ensure clean combustion.
- The government should undertake a thorough review of the various laws and institutions in order to look at their efficacy and utility; it must have detailed consultation with all relevant stakeholders, especially those outside Delhi, which includes farmers' groups and small scale industries and the public at large.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey**

Recently, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for October-December 2019.

This dataset differs from the Annual Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey, which covers both rural and urban areas. However, unemployment data for urban areas is released quarterly.

Key Points**Unemployment Rate:**

- It eased in urban areas to 7.9% in October-December 2019 compared to 9.9% in October-December 2018.
- However, state-wise data showed that urban unemployment rate was higher than the national average in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Telangana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi and Andhra Pradesh.

- Female unemployment rate decreased to 9.8% in October-December 2019 compared to 12.3% in October-December 2018.
- Male unemployment rate moderated to 7.3% in October-December 2019 from 9.2% in October-December 2018.

Labour Force Participation Rate:

- It rose to 37.2% in October-December 2019 from 36.3% in October-December 2018.
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)
- PLFS is India's first computer-based survey launched by the National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2017.
- It has been constituted based on the recommendation of a committee headed by Amitabh Kundu.
- PLFS has two fold objective:
 - To estimate the key employment and unemployment indicators (viz. Worker Population Ratio, Labour Force Participation Rate, Unemployment Rate) in the short time interval of three months for the urban areas only in the Current Weekly Status (CWS).
 - To estimate employment and unemployment indicators in both usual status and CWS in both rural and urban areas annually.
- Before PLFS, the NSSO (previous name of NSO) used to bring the data related to employment and unemployment based on its quinquennial (every 5 year) household socio-economic survey programme.

Key Terms

- Unemployment Rate (UR): UR is defined as the percentage of persons unemployed among the persons in the labour force.
- Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): LFPR is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
- Worker Population Ratio (WPR): WPR is defined as the percentage of employed persons in the population.
- Activity Status: The activity status of a person is determined on the basis of the activities pursued by the person during the specified reference period.
- Usual Status: The activity status determined on the basis of the reference period of the last 365 days preceding the date of survey, it is known as the usual activity status of the person.
- Current Weekly Status (CWS): The activity status determined on the basis of a reference period of the last 7 days preceding the date of survey is known as the current weekly status (CWS) of the person.

National Statistical Office

NSO is the central statistical agency of the Government mandated under the Statistical Services Act 1980 under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

It is responsible for the development of arrangements for providing statistical information services to meet the needs of the Government and other users for information on which to base policy, planning, monitoring and management decisions.

The services include collecting, compiling and disseminating official statistical information.

All business operations in NSO are done in compliance with international standards, procedures and best practices.

AGRICULTURE

Mandatory Jute Bag Packaging

Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved that 100% of the foodgrains and 20% of the sugar shall be mandatorily packed in jute bags.

The decision will give an impetus to the diversification of the jute industry.

Key Points

Extended Norms:

- The decision mandates that initially 10% of the orders of jute bags for packing food grains would be placed through a reverse auction on the GeM portal, which will gradually help in a regime of price discovery.
- In a reverse auction, the sellers compete to obtain business from the buyer and prices will typically decrease as the sellers underbid each other.
- Price discovery is the process of determining the price of an asset in the marketplace through the interactions of buyers and sellers.

Statutory Provision:

- Government has expanded the scope of mandatory packaging norms under the Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987, also known as the JPM Act.
- Under it, the Government is required to consider and provide for the compulsory use of jute packaging material in the supply and distribution of certain commodities.

Government Dependent Sector:

- The jute industry is predominantly dependent on the Government sector which purchases jute bags of value of more than Rs. 7,500 crore every year for packing foodgrains.
- This is done in order to sustain the core demand for the jute sector and to support the livelihood of the workers and farmers dependent on the sector.

Nearly 3.7 lakh workers and several lakh farm families are dependent for their livelihood on the jute sectors so the government has been making concerted efforts for the development of the jute sector by:

- Increasing the quality and productivity of raw jute.
- Diversifying the jute sector.
- Boosting and sustaining demand for jute products.

Benefits:

- The move will benefit farmers and workers located in the Eastern and North-Eastern regions of the country particularly in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura.
- The reservation norms in the present proposal would further the interest of domestic production of raw jute and jute packaging material in India, thereby, making India self-reliant in consonance with Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Government Initiatives for Promoting Jute Industry**Jute-Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise:**

Jute ICARE aims to improve the productivity and quality of raw jute.

Under it, the Government is disseminating improved agronomic practices such as line sowing using seed drills, distribution of quality certified seeds, etc.

Jute SMART:

- It is an e-govt initiative which was launched in December 2016 to promote transparency in the jute sector.
- It provides an integrated platform for procurement of sacking by Government agencies.

Definitive Anti-Dumping Duty:

- It has been imposed on import of jute goods from Bangladesh and Nepal with effect from 5th January 2017 to protect the domestic sector.

Incentive Scheme for Acquisition of Plants and Machinery:

- Launched in 2013, it aims to facilitate modernisation in existing and new jute mills and up-gradation of technology in existing jute mills.
- Collaboration between the National Jute Board and the National Institute of Design:
- It aims to support the diversification of the jute sector through a Jute Design Cell.
- National Jute Board under the Ministry of Textiles, acts as the apex body for the promotion of the products in India and abroad.
- Jute is included in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime of the country.

Jute

- Temperature: Between 25-35°C.
- Rainfall: Around 150-250 cm.
- Soil Type: Well-drained alluvial soil.
- Top Jute Producing States: West Bengal > Bihar > Assam > Andhra Pradesh > Odisha.
- It is mainly concentrated in eastern India because of the rich alluvial soil of Ganga-Brahmaputra delta.
- The world's largest jute producing countries are India, Bangladesh, China and Thailand.
- India is the world's largest producer of raw jute and jute goods, contributing to over 50% and 40% respectively of global production.
- It is known as the golden fibre because it is one of the longest and most used natural fibre for various textile applications.
- It is used in making gunny bags, mats, ropes, yarn, carpets and other artefacts.

- Due to its high cost, it is losing market to synthetic fibres and packing materials, particularly nylon.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SERB-POWER Scheme

Recently, the Union Minister for Science and Technology has launched SERB-POWER (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Exploratory Research) Scheme, which has two components of fellowship and research grants.

The Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), is a statutory body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.

Key Points

- It is a scheme designed exclusively for women scientists to mitigate gender disparity in science and engineering research in various science and technology (S&T) programmes in Indian academic institutions and research and development (R&D) laboratories.
- It will serve as a benchmark of recognition in the national scenario and will empower women scientists and cultivate a women-friendly culture and ensure more women in leadership positions in decision-making bodies.

SERB-POWER Fellowship:

Target:

Women researchers in 35-55 years of age.

Up-to 25 Fellowships per year and not more than 75 at any point in time.

Components of Support:

- Fellowship of Rs. 15,000/- per month in addition to regular income.
- Research grant of Rs. 10 lakh per annum.
- Overhead of Rs. 90,000/- per annum.

Duration:

Three years, without the possibility of extension. Once in a career.

SERB-POWER Research Grants:

Funding under Two Categories for up to 50 Power Grants:

Level I: Up to 60 lakhs for three years for applicants from IITs, IISERs, IISc, NITs, Central Universities, and National Labs of Central Government Institutions.

Level II: Up to 30 lakhs for three years for applicants from State Universities/Colleges and Private Academic Institutions.

Regulations:

Grants will be regulated through terms of reference conforming to SERB-Core Research Grant (CRG) guidelines.

Related Government Initiatives

Vigyan Jyoti Scheme:

Launched by the DST, it aims to create a level-playing field for the meritorious girls in high school to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in their higher education.

Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions Scheme:

GATI Scheme will develop a comprehensive charter and a framework for assessing gender equality in STEM.

Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing Scheme:

Started by the DST, KIRAN scheme aims to bring gender parity in the S&T sector by inducting more women talent in the R&D domain.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:

BBBP Scheme is the joint initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development to ensure survival, protection, and empowerment of the girl child.

National Science Day 2020:

It was celebrated on 28th February 2020 with the theme 'Women In Science'.

Dr Niti Kumar, a senior scientist from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Central Drug Research Institute (CSIR-CDRI), Lucknow received SERB Women Excellence Award-2020 on this occasion.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

DRIP Phase II and Phase III

Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) Phase II and Phase III.

It envisages comprehensive rehabilitation of 736 existing dams located across the country and complements the Dam Safety Bill, 2019.

Key Points

Objectives:

- To improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner.
- To strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at the central level.
- To explore the alternative incidental means at few of selected dams to generate the incidental revenue for sustainable operation and maintenance of dams.
- Project Cost and Funding: Rs. 10,211 crore.
- Financial assistance of Rs. 7,000 from the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).
- Rs. 3,211 crore is to be borne by the concerned implementing agencies in the states.
- Implementation Period: Over a period of 10 years from April 2021 to March 2031, in two phases of six years duration with two years overlapping.

Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project

- It was started in 2012 and was scheduled to be completed in 2018.
- In September 2018, the Government approved its revised cost estimates along with a two-year time extension from 2018 to 2020, for the completion.
- Apart from its general objectives, it also aims at ensuring the safety of downstream population and property that are affected in the case of a dam failure or operational failure.
- It was initially taken up for the repair and rehabilitation of dam projects across the seven states of India, namely Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand.

Depreciation of Rupee

Recently, the Indian rupee depreciated below the 74 levels against the US dollar.

Key Points

- The rupee depreciated by 16 paise to settle against the previous low of August 73.87 against the US dollar.
- The rupee depreciation is on account of global risk aversion. The investors are preferring a stable US dollar over rupee.
- Under risk aversion, an investor prefers lower returns with known risks rather than higher returns with unknown risks.
- The US dollar is advancing not only against the rupee but also against major currencies due to the surging Covid-19 cases.
- The escalating Covid-19 cases in Europe has stoked fears across markets that fresh lockdowns would further hit the already fragile economic recovery.

Appreciation and Depreciation of Currency

- In a floating exchange rate system, market forces (based on demand and supply of a currency) determine the value of a currency.
- Currency Appreciation: It is an increase in the value of one currency in relation to another currency.
- Currencies appreciate against each other for a variety of reasons, including government policy, interest rates, trade balances and business cycles.
- Currency appreciation discourages a country's export activity as its products and services become costlier to buy.
- Currency Depreciation: It is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system.
- Economic fundamentals, political instability, or risk aversion can cause currency depreciation.
- Currency depreciation encourages a country's export activity as its products and services become cheaper to buy.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Reforms in the United Nations (UN) are necessary in order to strengthen its effectiveness as a multilateral organization. Discuss in the light of the need for reform in the current UN systems. (250 words)

Ans.

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States.

Since its inception, the UN has performed numerous humanitarian, environmental and peace-keeping undertakings.

- For over the five decades, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has served as the world's nuclear inspector.
- UN treaties viz Chemical Weapons Convention-1997, the Mine-Ban Convention-1997 and the Arms Trade Treaty-2014 are the legal backbone of disarmament efforts.
- General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It has helped to enact dozens of legally binding agreements on political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights.

In recent years, there have been demands for reform of the whole body of the UN. Two basic kinds of reforms face the UN:

- Reform of the organisation's structures and processes.
- Review of issues that fall within the jurisdiction of the organisation.

Need for reforms:

- The UN represents a larger world and the irony is that its security council has only 5 permanent members.
- Current composition of the Security Council represents the post World War II realities and thus is not in pace with the changing balance of power in the world.
- At the time of the formation of UNSC, big powers were given privileges to make them part of the council. This was necessary for its proper functioning as well as to avoid the failure like that of the organization 'League of Nations'.
- The regions like far East Asia, South America, Africa have no representation in the permanent membership of the council.
- It is widely believed by the global south or the developing countries that the UN's decisions reflect only western values and interests and are dominated by a few powers.
- Rise of fora like G4 (India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan) as important economies and emerging world powers are pushing after quick UN Security Council reforms.
- Some countries and experts want the UN to play a greater or more effective role in peace and security missions, while others want its role to be confined to development and humanitarian work (health, education, environment etc).

India's stand:

- India believes that she deserves a permanent place in the council considering the size of its economy, population and the fact that it is the largest democracy in the world.
- India has become a major player not only in Asia but also in the world.
- The Security Council would be a more representative body if India would be there in it as a permanent member.

Conclusion

Reform and improvement are fundamental to any organisation to serve the needs of the changing environment. The UN is no exception.

In the current world scenario it has become crucial for the United Nations to reform itself and uphold its legitimacy.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Which of the given statements is/are correct regarding the jute crop?

1. The jute production in India is mainly concentrated in eastern states.
2. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime of India does not include jute crop.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. With reference to Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region, consider the following statements:

1. It is a statutory authority that will replace non-statutory Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA).
2. It will have experts from Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Civil Society.
3. The commission will not have the powers to issue directions to the states.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

3. Which of the following are the benefits under the Institution of Eminence Scheme?

1. Freedom of recruiting the faculties from outside India.
2. Additional funding upto 1000 Crore for Government Institutions .
3. No limitation on admitting foreign students.
4. Regular inspection by University Grants Commission (UGC).

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) **1 and 2 only**
- d) 1, 2 and 3

4. With reference to the currency depreciation, consider the following statements:

1. It is a fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system.
2. It discourages the country's export activity.

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. With reference to Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project, consider the following statements:

1. It envisages the repair and rehabilitation of dam projects in North-Eastern states only.
2. It is being funded by the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) **2 only**
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 and 2