GOVERNANCE

Academic Freedom in India

India has scored considerably low in the international Academic Freedom Index (AFI) with a score of 0.352.

Academic freedom, in general, refers to a scholar's freedom to express ideas without risk of official interference or professional disadvantage.

Key Points

About the Academic Freedom Index:

- It has been published by Global Public Policy Institute as a part of a global time-series dataset (1900-2019) in close cooperation with Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg, Scholars at Risk and the V-Dem Institute.
- It compares levels of academic freedom worldwide and enhances the understanding of its curtailments.
- The AFI used eight components to evaluate the scores: freedom to research and teach, freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, freedom of academic and cultural expression, constitutional protection of academic freedom, international legal commitment to academic freedom under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and existence of universities.
- The scores are scaled 0-1.
- The index did not report data for 35 countries - including the United States and Australia.
- Top Performers: Uruguay and Portugal top the AFI, with scores of 0.971 each, followed closely by Latvia (0.964) and Germany (0.960).
- India's performance on the index:
- India with a score of 0.352, is closely followed by Saudi Arabia (0.278) and Libya (0.238).
- In the last five years, the AFI of India has dipped by 0.1 points.
- Countries like Malaysia (0.582), Pakistan (0.554), Brazil (0.466), Somalia (0.436) and Ukraine (0.422) have scored better than India.
- India has not fared well in components like institutional autonomy, campus integrity, freedom of academic and cultural expression and constitutional protection of academic freedom.
- The AFI has cited the 'Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project', to suggest that the political tensions in India may have something to do with declining 'academic freedom'.
- According to the Report, political tensions in India have led to violent altercations between students, security forces, and off-campus groups, and have driven legal actions and disciplinary measures against scholars critical of those in power.

Challenges for India

- Freedom to Scholars: India fails to provide desired freedom to scholars to discuss politically and culturally controversial topics, without fearing for their life, studies or profession.
- Political Interference: Most universities in the country are subjected to unsolicited interference from governments in both academic and non-academic issues. It is common knowledge by now that a majority of appointments, especially to top-ranking posts like that of vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors and registrars, have been highly politicized.
- Corrupt Practices: Political appointments not only choke academic and creative freedom, but also lead to corrupt practices, including those in licensing and accreditation.
- Bureaucratisation of Universities: At present, many educational institutions and regulatory bodies, both at the Central and State levels, are headed by bureaucrats.
- Nepotism: Favouritism and nepotism in staff appointments and student admissions. This reflects a 'rent-seeking culture' within the academic community.
- Rent-seeking is an economic concept that occurs when an entity seeks to gain added wealth without any reciprocal contribution of productivity. Typically, it revolves around government-funded social services and social service programs.

Solutions

Implementing New Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- The NEP 2020 claims that it is based on principles of creativity and critical thinking and envisions an education system that is free from political or external interference.

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- The policy states that faculty will be given the "freedom to design their own curricular and pedagogical approaches within the approved framework, including textbook and reading material selections, assignments and assessments".
- It also suggests constituting a National Research Foundation (NRF), a merit-based and peer-reviewed research funding, which "will be governed, independently of the government, by a rotating Board of Governors consisting of the very best researchers and innovators across fields".
- Further, it aims to de-bureaucratise the education system by giving governance powers to academicians. It talks about giving autonomy to higher education institutions by handing over their administration to a board comprising academicians.

Regulatory and Governance Reforms:
- Restructure or merge different higher education regulators (UGC, AICTE, NCTE etc.) to ensure effective coordination. Amend UGC Act, 1956 to give legislative backing to regulatory structure.
- Select Vice-Chancellors of universities through a transparent & objective process.
- Link University grants to performance.

Way Forward
- Every government laments the absence of world-class universities, without realizing that it is attributable in part to their interventions and the growing intrusion of political processes. Where politics is largely kept out—as in IIT, IIM or the IISc—institutions thrive.
- Higher education policy-makers must respond to declining AFi scores. This will also help in making "India a global knowledge superpower", aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG 4 -Quality Education).
- Academic freedom is primary because universities are places for raising doubts and asking questions about everything. Exploring ideas, debating issues and thinking independently are essential in the quest for excellenc

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Growing Trend of Jobs for Locals
Recently, Haryana Assembly has passed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020 to reserve 75% of private-sector jobs in the state for local residents.
It has led to a new debate on the growing trend of jobs for locals and the associated concerns.
Key Points
Provisions of the Bill:
- Every employer shall employ 75% of the local candidates with respect to such posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are not more than Rs. 50,000 or as notified by the government, from time to time.
- Provided that the local candidates may be from any district of the State, but the employer may, at his option, restrict the employment of local candidates from any district to 10% of the total number of local candidates.
- A designated portal shall be made on which local candidates and the employer will have to register and local candidates shall not be eligible to avail the benefit unless they register themselves on the designated portal.
- Once it becomes law, it will apply to companies, societies, trusts, limited liability partnership firms, partnership firms, etc. located across the state.
- It has been criticised for not being in the best interest of the industries as it will affect the competitiveness of the industries and will lead to loss of investments in Haryana.

Jobs For Locals
Job Reservation for Locals:
- Nativism, the cry for job protection of locals, has been on a rise recently in India.
- Various states have taken similar steps with respect to job reservation for locals (JRFL) with the promised reservations ranging from 30% to the more common range of 70-80%.
- The move is applicable to both the government and/or the private sector.

Earlier Attempts:
- It has been mooted by several parties (ruling or opposition leaders) in States such as Maharashtra (1968 onwards and 2008), Himachal Pradesh (2004), Odisha (2008), Karnataka (2014, 2016, 2019), Andhra Pradesh (2019), Madhya Pradesh (2019).
- However, none of these has been implemented and has remained only on paper due to lack of implementation mechanism and reluctant attitudes of industries bodies.

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- The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of movement and consequently employment within India through several provisions.
- Article 14 provides for equality before law irrespective of place of birth.
- Article 15 guards against discrimination based on place of birth.
- Article 16 guarantees no birthplace-based discrimination in public employment.
- Article 19 ensures that citizens can move freely throughout the territory of India.

Reasons Behind Such Legislations:
- Vote Bank Politics: Inter-state migrant workers (ISMW) constitute a sizeable "under-used or un-used" electorate as they often do not exercise voting rights. If these workers and potential migrants could be retained through JRFL and provided with jobs, the parties' electoral causes will be served.
- Economic Sluggishness: The native unemployment issue assumes relevance as joblessness has intensified in the context of shrinking government employment.
- Increased Incomes and Talent: JRFL will not only retain talent but also incomes which otherwise will go to "other regions".
- Precondition for Land Acquisition: Farmers and villagers, who lose their land in the process of land acquisition for industries, keep such preconditions in which industries have to provide jobs to local youth.

Impacts:
- Reduced job creation due to deterrence for industries in a state with such restrictions. This would do more harm to natives than actually benefiting them.
- Such restrictions may hamper the growth and development prospects of the respective state as well as the country by affecting ease of doing business.
- Restrictions on labour mobility would disregard this advantage of the diverse labour pool, which is a strength of the Indian economy.
- May promote aggressive regionalism and thus a threat to the unity and integrity of India.
- Increased risks of labour shortages, rise in unemployment, aggravate wage inflation and worsened regional inequalities are few other possible impacts.

Way Forward
- The idea of JRFL amounts to carving out 'countries' within a country and is based on a dubious assumption that skills in the local market are omnipresent.
- The best way to grow out of it is to ensure economic recovery and provide enough job opportunities for youths with skill training and proper education as key focus areas, enabling the masses to compete in the free market.
- States need to create a framework where safe interstate migration for work is facilitated and fiscal coordination is pursued to enable the portability of social security benefits. If this is done, interstate migration would rise and provide more opportunities to remedy regional disparities.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Metro Neo

The Centre is planning to approve national standard specifications for Metro Neo, a no-frills, low-cost urban rail transit system targeted at tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

Key Points
- Metro Neo is a mass rapid transit system providing low-cost, energy-efficient and eco-friendly urban transport solutions for tier 2 and tier 3 cities.
- Drawing traction power from overhead wires, Metro Neo will not run on track but on road. It is suitable for places where the traffic demand is around 8,000 passengers one way in peak time.
- Metro Neo systems are lighter and smaller than conventional Metro trains.
- They cost about 25% of conventional systems but with similar facilities, and are cheaper than the other budget option Metrolite, which costs about 40% of the normal Metro.
- The Maharashtra government has already given a green signal for this state-of-the-art Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) for Nashik.
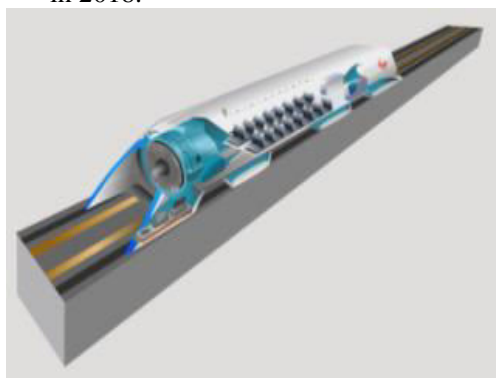
Metro Trains and Metrolite:
- The metro rail system being developed at present is of high capacity which is required for bigger cities with very high ridership and Peak Hour Peak Direction Traffic (PHPDT).

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- Seeing the success of metro rail in the country, several other cities with lower projection of ridership are also aspiring for a rail based mass rapid transit system, which could be fulfilled by Light Urban Rail Transit System named "Metrolite" with lesser capacity at much less cost.
- 'Metrolite' would also act as a feeder system to high capacity Metro.

Other New Modes of Urban Mobility

Hyperloop Transportation System:

- It is a transportation system where a pod-like vehicle is propelled through a near-vacuum tube connecting cities at speeds matching that of an aircraft.
- The hyperloop concept is a brainchild of Tesla founder Elon Musk. The hyperloop system is being designed to transport passengers and freight.
- The USA-based Hyperloop Transport Technology (HTT) has claimed that it costs USD 40 million per kilometre to build a hyperloop system while building a high-speed train line would cost almost twice.
- The Maharashtra government had signed an agreement with Virgin group to build a Hyperloop in 2018.

Pod Taxi:

- In 2017, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) had called the expression of interest (EOI) for launching India's first driverless pod taxi systems on a 70 km stretch from Dhaula Kuan in Delhi to Manesar in Haryana. Pod Taxi Scheme is also called the Personal Rapid Transit (PRT).
- PRT consists of driverless vehicles in the shape of pods, which can hold two to six people each, and run along a predetermined course at 80-130 km per hour.

Way Forward

- India grapples with a host of mobility-related challenges like pollution and traffic congestion, thus it is essential to ramp up and optimise mobility services.
- The focus has to be on promoting green, clean mobility. Electric vehicles are already on high priority on the government's agenda.
- Further, mobility services should be convenient to access by the public and secure, even for the fringes of the demographic, including women, children and the elderly.
- Cities are engines of economic growth. Thus, for a fast urbanising country such as India, we need such a fuel efficient mass rapid transit system to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and ensure movement of people instead of moving vehicles.

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India's Annual Resolution on Counter-Terror

Recently, India's annual resolution on the issue of counter-terrorism was adopted by consensus in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Key Points

- India's resolution 'Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction' was co-sponsored by more than 75 countries and adopted by consensus without a vote.
- India, a victim of state-sponsored cross-border terrorism, has been at the forefront in highlighting the serious threat to international peace and security emanating from acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by terrorist groups.
- India's resolution predates the adoption of resolution 1540 by the Security Council.
- In resolution 1540 of the year 2004, the Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes.
- It needs to be noted that the UN has not agreed on a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) yet.
- In 1996, with the objective of providing a comprehensible legal framework to counter terrorism, India proposed to the UNGA the adoption of the "Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism" (CCIT).
- CCIT seeks a universal definition of terrorism, prosecution of terrorists under special laws, making cross-border terrorism an extraditable offence worldwide, among others.

Weapon of Mass Destruction:

- WMD refers to a weapon with the capacity to inflict death and destruction on such a massive scale and so indiscriminately that its very presence in the hands of a hostile power can be considered a grievous threat.
- Modern weapons of mass destruction are either nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons—frequently referred to collectively as NBC weapons.
- Efforts to control the spread of WMD are enshrined in international agreements such as the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty of 1968, the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972, and the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993.
- India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty of 1968.
- India has enacted an act to prohibit unlawful activities, in relation to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems which is known as The Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of unlawful activities) Act, 2005.

United Nations General Assembly

- UNGA is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, serving as the main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the UN.
- UN is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States.
- The other five organs of the UN are: Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the UN Secretariat.

First Committee of the UNGA

- The First Committee (Disarmament and International security) deals with disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community and seeks out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime.
- The Committee works in close cooperation with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament. It is the only Main Committee of the General Assembly entitled to verbatim records coverage.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Covid-19 Insurance to Green Soldiers: PTR

Recently, Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Arunachal Pradesh has become the first in the eight-State northeast to provide insurance cover against Covid-19 for "green soldiers".

Eight-State northeast includes Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

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Key Points

- 57 frontline staff (referred to as green soldiers) of the Park have been insured for nine months against health issues due to the infection by the Covid-19.
- The forest guards are rightly the green soldiers in the frontline of India's wildlife, and the onus of wildlife conservation pretty much falls on them.
- The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), an NGO, paid the insurance amount with support from Foundation Serge.
- The NGO has been supporting India's frontline forest staff with accident cover for the last 20 years.
- The insurance coverage is of Rs. 1 lakh each but a few who would be retiring soon has been insured for Rs. 50,000.

Pakke Tiger Reserve

- PTR (declared in 1999-2000) lies in the foothills of the eastern Himalaya in the East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh and is also known as Pakhui Tiger Reserve.
- It falls within the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot.
- It is home to over 2000 species of plants, 300 species of birds, 40 species of mammals, etc. Many species of the flora and fauna are globally threatened, and PTR is one of the last remaining strongholds left for these species.
- It is known for its amazing sightings of four resident hornbill species.
- The great hornbill is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh and it is 'vulnerable' under the IUCN Red List.

Other Protected Areas in Arunachal Pradesh:

- Talle Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Dihang Dibang Biosphere Reserve.
- Eagle Nest Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Namdapha Tiger Reserve.
- Mouling National Park.
- Sessa Orchid Sanctuary.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. "Jawaharlal Nehru, India's founding statesman, was a great figure whose legacy transcended national boundaries". Comment. (250 words)

Ans.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, has in many ways contributed in laying the foundation of post-independent India. This can be reflected through policies of democratic socialism, non-alignment, secularism and institutionalisation of democracy etc.

Institutionalisation of Democracy

- Nehruvian ideals envisioned in 'Objective Resolution', steered the Constituent Assembly to draw up the philosophy of Indian constitution i.e. Preamble.
- The nature of the Nehruvian way of politics (debate and deliberation) led to development of respect for parliamentary procedures, abiding faith in the constitutional system.
- Nehru also believed in democracy at grassroots level in India (panchayati raj institutions).

Ideal of Secularism

- Nehru believed that India belonged to all who had contributed to its history and civilisation, and that the majority community had a special obligation to protect the rights, and promote the well-being, of the minorities.
- This helped in building the narrative of **'Unity in Diversity'**.

Democratic Socialism

- Through the planned economy approach, Nehru envisaged that in a land of extreme poverty and inequality, the objective of government policy must be the welfare of the poorest, most deprived and most marginalised of the people.

Non-Alignment Policy

- For Nehru, Non-alignment (NAM) was the response to the bipolar divisions of the Cold War era.
- After two centuries of British rule, Nehru was determined to protect the country's strategic autonomy without compromising independence by aligning itself to either superpower in the Cold War.

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- This policy of NAM, made India one of the most distinguished leaders of Third World solidarity, reached out to the rest of the colonised world, and forged a joint front against colonialism and a reinvented imperialism.

Conclusion

With these socio-economic-political contributions, Jawaharlal Nehru can be rightfully called the maker of modern India. Moreover, the recent developments such as emergence of a new era of the Cold War between the US and China, failure of neo-liberal economic policies-which can reflected in rising inequalities, growing intolerance and disharmony within Indian society, need for development of scientific temperament, etc. marks the relevance of Nehruvian ideology in present times also.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Consider the following statements about the Academic Freedom Index (AFI)?
   1. The AFI is published by the Global Public Policy Institute.
   2. Australia and Brazil are the top performers in the index.
   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

2. With reference to National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), consider the following statements:
   1. The Indian government has a 100% stake in NIIF.
   2. Strategic Opportunities Fund is one of its components.
   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 the Hyperloop Transportation System, consider the following statements:
   1. In this system a pod-like vehicle is propelled through a near-vacuum tube.
   2. The low air pressure allows the pod to travel substantially free of air friction.
   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 First Committee of UN General Assembly, consider the following statements:
   1. The First Committee of the UN General Assembly deals with the Disarmament and International security.
   2. India's resolution on 'Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction' failed as parties could not reach a consensus.
   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 E-YUVA Scheme, consider the following statements:
   1. It aims to promote a culture of applied research.
   2. It is implemented by the Ministry of Education.
   Which of the above statements is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 and 2

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