

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Month of

OCTOBER-2020



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CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 1 (OCTOBER, 2020)

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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MSP FOR FARMERS

CONTEXT

The recently enacted law that dismantles the monopoly of APMC (agricultural produce market committee) mandis, has raised concerns that farmers may no longer be assured MSP for their crop.

Let's understand the basis of MSP, how is it fixed, and how binding is it?

◎ BACKGROUND:

- œ It was in the early 1960s when India was facing an enormous shortage of cereals that new agricultural policies were born marking the start of the Green Revolution.
- œ In 1964, the government set up the **Food Corporation of India (FCI)** to procure foodgrains from farmers at remunerative prices, and through the **public distribution system** distribute them to consumers and also maintain **buffer stock** for food security.
- œ In order to buy foodgrains, there had to be a policy on pricing.
- œ In 1965, an **Agricultural Prices Commission** was set up to advise on the pricing policy for agricultural commodities and its impact on the economy.
- œ It was then that the Price Support Policy of the Government came in, providing a foolproof solution to agricultural producers against a sharp fall in farm prices.
- œ The minimum guaranteed prices are fixed to set a floor below which market prices cannot fall. If no one else buys it, the government will buy the stock at this minimum guaranteed prices.
- œ This is what came to be known as the **minimum support price or MSP**.
 - > This policy took its final shape around **1974-76**.
 - > The MSP serves as a long-term guarantee for investment decisions of producers. It came with an assurance that prices would not fall below a fixed level, even in case of a bumper crop.
 - > MSP was introduced to provide financial stability to the agricultural system and encourage production.

◎ ANALYSIS:

What is Minimum Support Price (MSP)?

- œ The **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** is only a government policy that is part of administrative decision-making. The government declares MSPs for crops, but there's no law mandating their implementation.

- œ The Centre currently fixes MSPs for 23 farm commodities —
 - > 7 cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley)
 - > 5 pulses (chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur)
 - > 7 oilseeds (rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower and nigerseed)
 - > 4 commercial crops (cotton, sugarcane, copra and raw jute) — based on the CACP's recommendations.

Who announced MSP?

- œ The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs announces MSP based on the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- œ The CACP takes into account demand and supply, the cost of production and price trends in the market among other things when fixing MSPs.
- œ The price is announced at the beginning of the sowing season.

Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP)

- . The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) is an attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
- . It came into existence in January 1965.
- . Currently, the Commission comprises a Chairman, Member Secretary, one Member (Official) and two Members (Non-Official).
 - > The non-official members are representatives of the farming community and usually have an active association with the farming community.
- . It can recommend MSPs, but the decision on fixing (or even not fixing) and enforcement rests finally with the government.

The next step in the process

- œ The Food Corporation of India and NAFED help the Centre procure select food crops with the **help of the States**.
- œ Procured farm products are kept in government warehouses and distributed through the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** and various food security programmes.

Public Distribution System (PDS)

- . Public distribution system is a government-sponsored chain of shops entrusted with the work of distributing basic food and non-food commodities to the needy sections of the society at very cheap prices.
- . Food Corporation of India manages the public distribution system.

Why MSP is important?

- œ Price volatility makes life difficult for farmers. Though prices of agri commodities may soar while in short supply, during years of bumper production, prices of the very same commodities plummet.
- œ MSPs ensure that farmers get a minimum price for their produce in adverse markets.
- œ MSPs have also been used as a tool by the Government to incentivise farmers to grow crops that are in short supply.

MSP and the new Law

- œ It is somewhat strange that the concept of minimum support price finds no mention in any law even if it has been around for decades.
- œ While the government does declare the MSP twice a year, there is no law making MSP mandatory.

- œ What this technically means is that the government, though it buys at MSP from farmers, is not obliged by law to do so.
- œ As a matter of fact, there is no law which says that MSP can be imposed on private traders as well.
- œ The CACP had asked earlier recommended legislation to iron out a concrete MSP law for farmers, but it was not accepted by the Centre.

The Farmers Bill

- . **The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020** allows farmers to sell their produce outside APMC mandis to whoever, even the end customer, offers a higher price.
- . The second one — **The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020** — allows farmers to enter into a contract farming agreement the buyer for procurement of crops at pre-approved prices.
- . The third bill is **The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill** which declassifies items like onions, cereals, pulses, potatoes, edible oilseeds and oils as essential items in normal circumstances.

⦿ **CONCLUSION:**

- œ The Farm Bills technically have nothing to do with MSP and since there is no existing legislative framework for MSP, it is difficult to see how MSP could have been worked into the Bills.

NET ZERO BY 2060: CHINA'S BOLD NEW CARBON EMISSIONS GOAL

CONTEXT

In a latest announcement, China has announced it plans to boost country's Paris climate accord target and called for a green revolution.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- œ China's announcement came just minutes after US President Donald Trump blasted Beijing for "rampant pollution".
 - > The US and China have been hit this year by extreme weather of the kind predicted by scientists to accompany climate change.
 - > In China, heavy rains over the summer unleashed the most punishing flood season in about 30 years, while the US is facing one of its busiest hurricane seasons at the same time that record wildfires ravage western states.
- œ European officials were also expected to press China to toughen its climate goals.
- œ The EU wanted Chinese emissions to peak by 2025 instead of the country's target date of 2030.

◎ ANALYSIS:

Is it a realistic plan?

- œ Going carbon neutral means that China would remove the same amount of carbon it's emitting into the atmosphere to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.
- œ So, by 2060, China would theoretically only use clean energy sources and capture or offset any remaining emissions.
- œ But China is yet to define exactly what that would look like.
- œ Still, the target puts China more closely in alignment with the European Union, the UK, and other countries that have committed to carbon neutrality by 2050, which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said is required to prevent over 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming.

Carbon neutrality

- . The term "carbon neutrality" means releasing no additional CO₂ into the atmosphere.
- . Though technically it allows countries to keep emitting if they ensure that an equal amount is captured again in some form.

Stronger set of goals under the Paris Agreement

- œ Along with the pledge to be carbon neutral by 2060, China also announced to submit a stronger set of goals under the Paris agreement.
- œ China would aim to peak carbon emissions before 2030, upping the commitment from "around" 2030.

Will it be a challenge for China?

- œ The goal will be a challenge for China, which relies heavily for its **electricity on coal**, one of the most **carbon-intensive fossil fuels**.
- œ China released the equivalent of 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide, or CO₂, into the atmosphere in 2018, according to the Global Carbon Project that tracks emissions worldwide.
- œ That was almost twice as much as the United States and three times as much as the European Union.

Which other countries are on the same path?

- œ Twenty-nine nations before China have pledged to achieve climate neutrality in different years, according to the Carbon Neutrality Coalition.
- œ With China, the 30 countries that have some kind of carbon neutrality pledges, account for about 43 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels.
- œ The largest polluting countries not on the list are the **United States, India, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey, Brazil and Australia**.

◎ CONCLUSION:

- œ China has yet to publish an official plan for how it would achieve carbon neutrality, but climate researchers have mapped out pathways. The good news: Researchers say it is possible.

LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND WILDFIRES

CONTEXT

While wildfires are typical in both California and parts of Australia in the summer months, the intensity and scale of wildfires that these areas have seen in recent years has raised some concerns among scientists about the linkages between human-induced climate change and fire risk.

● ABOUT:

- œ In an updated review of scientific articles that try to establish a link between climate change and fire risk published since January 2020, scientists note that human-induced climate change promotes the conditions on which wildfires depend, enhancing their likelihood and challenging suppression efforts.
- œ The update focuses on the ongoing wildfires in the western US and the bushfires that ravaged southeastern Australia in 2019-2020.
- œ Further, the authors note that climate change increases the frequency and severity of fire weather around the world and that land management alone “cannot explain recent increases in wildfire because increased fire weather from climate change amplifies fire risk where fuels remain available”.

Factors that can influence fire weather

- œ The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was published in 2013, identified a few factors that could influence the way wildfires play out. These include-
 - > global increase in average temperatures
 - > global increases in the frequency, intensity and extent of heatwaves (breaching of historically extreme temperature thresholds)
 - > regional increases in the frequency, duration and intensity of droughts

Understanding from new trends of forest fire

- œ Scientists are wary of attributing any single contemporary event to climate change, mainly because of the difficulty in completely ruling out the possibility of the event having been caused by some other reason, or a result of natural variability.
- œ However, new analysis shows that natural variability is superimposed on the increasingly warm and dry conditions that have resulted from climate change, which has led to more extreme fires and more extreme fire seasons.

- œ Further, there is an “unequivocal and pervasive role of climate change in increasing the intensity and length in which fire weather occurs”.
- œ While land management is also likely to contribute to the wildfires, it does not alone account for the recent increases in the extent and severity of the wildfires in the western US and in southeast Australia.

Forest fire in Australia

- œ While bushfires are routine in Australia in the summer months, the scale and intensity of the fires last year was unprecedented.
- œ The fires killed thousands of animals and impacted more than 10 million hectares of forest land, which is an area the size of South Korea.
- œ Scientists suggested at the time that there was strong evidence to suggest that the bushfires, which were especially fierce last year, could be linked to climate change.

Why Forest Fires Are Both Necessary and Dangerous?

. The Ecological Benefits of Wildfires

- > **Promote ecological health:** Humans have been performing such burns for thousands of years and for multiple reasons, but, today, they are mainly used to promote ecological health and prevent larger, more damaging, uncontrolled fires.
- > **Bring survival and production:** Fire is a natural phenomenon, and nature has evolved with its presence. Many ecosystems benefit from periodic fires, because they clear out dead organic material—and some plant and animal populations require the benefits fire brings to survive and reproduce.
- > **Increase in soil fertility:** When humans perform a prescribed burn, the goal is to remove that layer of decay in a controlled manner, allowing the other, healthy parts of the ecosystem to thrive.
 - Moreover, nutrients released from the burned material, which includes dead plants and animals, return more quickly into the soil than if they had slowly decayed over time.

. In this way, fire increases soil fertility—a benefit that has been exploited by farmers for centuries.

- > **Essential for life cycle:** Several plants actually require fire to move along their life cycles. Even some animals depend on fire.

. **Harmful Effects of Wildfires**

- > **Long term effect on nature:** Wildfires can have immediate and long term effects on the quality of rivers, lakes, and streams.
- > **Prevent absorption of water:** The most noticeable impact of wildfires is storm water runoff. After the loss of vegetation, the ground's soil becomes hydrophobic and prevents the absorption of water.

. This inability to absorb water promotes the transportation of debris and sediment into larger bodies of water, further polluting valuable and essential resources.

- > **Post-fire flash floods:** Post-fire flash floods become a threat and allow the introduction of heavy metals from ash and soil to infiltrate waterways. Filtering these water sources can be costly as well as time consuming.
- > **A threat to survival:** The flames from these fires destroy the food source and homes of many animals, threatening their survival. For plants and trees that can survive the flames,

they are susceptible to disease, fungus, and insects due to their decreased resistance following burn injuries.

- > **Impact on air quality:** Wildfires have both immediate and long-term impacts on air quality. As a forest burns, large amounts of smoke are released into the atmosphere. These smoke particles are typically small and made up of gases and water vapor.
- > **A threat to human health:** Air pollution from fires has the potential to travel great distances and oftentimes may pose a threat to human health. These small particles can become lodged deep within lungs, making it difficult to breath as well as placing additional stress on our hearts.

© **CONCLUSION:**

- œ There are many ecological benefits of forest fire but, the present day forest fires are a big issue in many parts of the world. The human-induced climate change has promoted the conditions on which wildfires depends. Hence, regulating bodies need to be vigilant and preemptive with forest fires, in order to help curb their frequency. Further, Regional think-tanks and governing bodies can help create a strategy for at-risk areas where each local population and fire prevention and suppression group can be involved.



HOW 'HINDI' STANDS THE TEST AMONG A PLETHORA OF LANGUAGES IN INDIA

CONTEXT

The new education policy has made Hindi the centre of a controversy. The main clause that came under fire was the “3-language formula”, which is seen as a move to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states.

● **BACKGROUND:**

- œ Throughout the world, language is a major marker of human identity – so much so that in places such as Europe, nations and language communities – such as the French, Germans and Poles – are seen as synonymous.
- œ While not as salient in India, here too, language has played a major part in the country's politics.
- œ In India, the issue of adopting a 'national language' could not be resolved when the Constituent Assembly began drafting India's Constitution.
- œ The adoption of a national language, the language in which the Constitution was to be written, and the language in which the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly were to be conducted were the main questions debated.
- œ On the one side were members from the Hindi-speaking provinces who moved a number of pro-Hindi amendments and argued for adopting Hindi as the sole national language.

● **ANALYSIS:**

Linguistic Diversity of India

- œ India, undoubtedly is a treasure trove of linguistic diversity, with nearly 450 living languages — 22 of them granted the status of a 'Scheduled language' under the Constitution.
- œ Nevertheless, the country also faces the perennial threat of indigenous languages dying.
- œ As per the **first-ever linguistic survey** conducted, completed between 2010 and 2013, India has already lost over 200 indigenous languages in the last 50 years.
- œ It is claimed that another 150 languages could vanish in the coming decades.

Language provisions in the Constitution of the Indian Union

- œ The Constitution adopted in 1950 stipulated that English and Hindi would be used for **the Union's official business** for a period of fifteen years.

- œ After that time, Hindi was supposed to become the sole official language of the Union.
- œ It proved impossible to replace English with Hindi, however, because of strong opposition from the southern states, where **Dravidian languages** were spoken.
- œ They felt that the federal government was trying to impose Hindi across the country, including the south, and preferred to continue using English, which they found more “acceptable” because, unlike Hindi, it was not associated with any particular ethnic group.
- œ Later, the **Official Languages Act** legally established Hindi and English as the languages used in Congress, while leaving states and territories free to choose their own official languages.

Does India have any national language?

- œ No. India does not have any national language.
 - > A **national language** is a language that is symbolic of a country, usually for historic, cultural and ethnic reasons.
 - > An **official language** is only designated for communication at the official level.

The spread of Hindi language

- œ Widespread resistance to the imposition of Hindi on non-native speakers, especially in Tamil Nadu, led to the passage of the **Official Languages Act of 1963**, which provided for the continued use of English for all official purposes.
- œ Hindi became the **sole working language** of the Union government by **1965** with the State governments free to function in the language of their choice.
- œ Meanwhile, the constitutional directive for the Union government to encourage the spread of Hindi was retained within Central government entities in non-Hindi-speaking States.
- œ Hindi speakers from the IT, construction and other sectors began moving for jobs to the south where many languages and dialects are spoken.
- œ Despite this migration to States that speak other languages, the Census found that while Hindi is the fastest growing language, the number of speakers of other languages has dropped.

- œ In Tamil Nadu, for example, over a 10-year period, the number of Tamil speakers of Hindi doubled largely because Tamilians needed to converse with those who came from the north.

Important facts on Hindi

- . Hindi belongs to the **Indo-Aryan** branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Hindi, along with English, are the **official languages** of India.
- . According to Article 343, ***"The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for the official purpose of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals."***
- . Hindi was the language that was adopted by Indian leaders as a symbol of national identity during the struggle for freedom.
- . Hindi has been used as a **literary language** since the **twelfth century**.

History of anti-Hindi movement

- œ The conflict of deciding on Hindi as the official language can be traced back to the pre-Independence days.
- œ In 1937, the Congress-led government in Madras Presidency under the leadership of **C. Rajagopalachari** introduced compulsory Hindi education in schools across the region. (Madras Presidency was later split into four states of South India — Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala).
- œ This sparked massive protests and anti-Hindi demonstrations, especially by EVR Periyar, a pioneer of rationalist and anti-caste Dravidian politics in the region.
- œ The agitations lasted for three years, until the move was repealed in 1940.
- œ After long debates, the Parliament passed 'Official Language Resolution' in 1968.
- œ Hindi-speaking states had to teach some Indian language besides Hindi and in non-Hindi speaking states, Hindi was to be taught besides English and the local or regional language.
- œ This three-language formula was accepted by the entire country, but Tamil Nadu remained adamant.

Proportion of South Indian language speakers falling

- œ While high population growth in North India has helped Hindi surge, lower population growth in

the five Dravidian language-speaking states – Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana – has resulted in the proportion of Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam falling.

- œ While Hindi grew by 161% between 1971 and 2011, for example, the four largest Dravidian languages grew at half that rate – 81% – over the same period.
- œ In addition, growing migration from north to south has meant a greater presence of Hindi in the five southern states.

How India is losing its language?

- œ According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each.
- œ The Constitution lists **22 languages** and protects them in the **eighth schedule**.
- œ Many languages are kept out of this schedule even if they deserve to be included.
 - > This includes Tulu which is spoken by over 1.8 million people and has inscriptions dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries.
- œ When a refined language loses its status in literary and daily interactions, the way of life associated with it also vanishes.
- œ On the other hand, Hindi, a much younger Indo-Aryan language, has been gaining prominence since before independence. Old Hindi assimilated words from Persian.
- œ With the arrival of Islamic administrative rule in north India, it became Hindustani.
- œ The growing importance of Hindustani in colonial India and the association of Urdu with Muslims prompted Hindus in north India to develop a Sanskritised version, leading to the formation of a modern standard Hindi a century later.
- œ It was based on the vernacular of Delhi and the surrounding region and came to replace prestige dialects such as Awadhi, Maithili and Braj.
- œ The literary value of these dialects diminished in due course.

When does a language become extinct?

- œ According to the criteria adopted by UNESCO, a language becomes extinct, **when nobody speaks or remembers the language**.
- œ UNESCO has categorized languages on basis of endangerment as:
 - > Vulnerable
 - > definitely endangered
 - > severely endangered
 - > critically endangered

- œ Some critically endangered languages as per UNESCO are:
 - > Aimol, spoken in Manipur
 - > Bagahti spoken in Himachal Pradesh
 - > Nihali spoken in Maharashtra
 - > Toto in West Bengal
 - > Todo in Tamil Nadu

Government schemes to protect the language

- œ Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India
- œ Under the scheme "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India", the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) is working on the protection, preservation and documentation of endangered languages.

- œ It is the onus of the CIIL to protect, preserve and document endangered languages, even language spoken by less than 1000 people also as against the scheme, which is preserving the languages, spoken by less than 10000 people.

Closing thoughts

- œ National integration in a multilingual country does not require the imposition of one official language on the country, especially when the language selected for the purpose is one of its many regional languages even if it happens to be that of the largest linguistic group in the country. At the same time, the convenience, in fact the necessity, of having one or more languages as the official (not national, as all languages spoken in a country can claim to be national) language or languages for centre-state and inter-state communication for political, economic, legal and even social reasons cannot be disputed.



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HOW '3 PRIOR PANDEMICS' TRIGGERED MASSIVE SOCIETAL SHIFTS?

CONTEXT

Pandemics can alter a society's fundamental worldview, upend core economic structures and sway power struggles among nations

◎ **BACKGROUND:**

- œ Before March of this year, few probably thought disease could be a significant driver of human history.
- œ Not so anymore. People are beginning to understand that the little changes COVID-19 has already ushered in or accelerated – telemedicine, remote work, social distancing, the death of the handshake, online shopping, the virtual disappearance of cash and so on – have begun to change their way of life.
 - > They may not be sure whether these changes will outlive the pandemic.
 - > And they may be uncertain whether these changes are for good or ill.
- œ Three previous plagues could yield some clues about the way COVID-19 might bend the arc of history.
- œ Pandemics tend to shape human affairs in three ways.
 - > They can profoundly alter a society's fundamental worldview
 - > They can upend core economic structures
 - > They can sway power struggles among nations

Sickness spurs the rise of the Christian West

- œ **Where:** Roman Empire
- œ **When:** A.D. 165 to A.D. 262
- œ **Impact:** It's been estimated that the combined pandemics' (Antonine plague, and its twin, the Cyprian plague) mortality rate was anywhere from one-quarter to one-third of the empire's population.
- œ While staggering, the number of deaths tells only part of the story. This also triggered a profound transformation in the religious culture of the Roman Empire.
- œ On the eve of the Antonine plague, the empire was pagan. The vast majority of the population worshipped multiple gods and spirits and believed that rivers, trees, fields and buildings each had their own spirit.

- œ Christianity, a monotheistic religion that had little in common with paganism, had only 40,000 adherents, no more than 0.07% of the empire's population.
- œ Yet within a generation of the end of the Cyprian plague, Christianity had become the dominant religion in the empire.

The plague of Justinian and the fall of Rome

- œ **Where:** Roman Empire
- œ **When:** A.D. 542 – A.D. 755
- œ **Impact:** During its two centuries of recurrence, it killed an estimated 25% to 50% of the population – anywhere from 25 million to 100 million people.
- œ This massive loss of lives crippled the economy, triggering a financial crisis that exhausted the state's coffers and hobbled the empire's once mighty military.
- œ In the east, Rome's principal geopolitical rival, **Sassanid Persia**, was also devastated by the plague and was therefore in no position to exploit the Roman Empire's weakness.
- œ But the forces of the **Islamic Rashidun Caliphate in Arabia** – which had long been contained by the Romans and Sasanians – were largely unaffected by the plague.
- œ Caliph Abu Bakr didn't let the opportunity go to waste. Seizing the moment, his forces swiftly conquered the entire Sasanian Empire while stripping the weakened Roman Empire of its territories in the Levant, the Caucasus, Egypt and North Africa.
- œ Pre-pandemic, the Mediterranean world had been relatively unified by commerce, politics, religion and culture.
- œ What emerged was a fractured trio of civilizations jockeying for power and influence:
 - > an Islamic one in the eastern and southern Mediterranean basin
 - > a Greek one in the northeastern Mediterranean
 - > a European one between the western Mediterranean and the North Sea.

- œ This last civilization – what we now call medieval Europe – was defined by a new, distinctive economic system.
- œ Before the plague, the European economy had been based on slavery.
- œ After the plague, the significantly diminished supply of slaves forced landowners to begin granting plots to nominally “free” laborers – serfs who worked the lord’s fields and, in return, received military protection and certain legal rights from the lord.
- œ The seeds of **feudalism** were planted.

The Black Death of the Middle Ages

- œ **Where:** Europe
- œ **When:** 1347
- œ **Impact:** It subsequently killed between one-third and one-half of the total European population of 80 million people.
- œ But it killed more than people. By the time the pandemic had burned out by the early 1350s, a distinctly modern world emerged – one defined by free labor, technological innovation and a growing middle class.
- œ Before the **Yersinia pestis bacterium** arrived in 1347, Western Europe was a feudal society that was overpopulated.
- œ Labor was cheap, serfs had little bargaining power, social mobility was stymied and there was little incentive to increase productivity.
- œ But the loss of so much life shook up an ossified society.
- œ Labor shortages gave peasants more bargaining power. In the agrarian economy, they also encouraged the widespread adoption of new and existing technologies – the iron plow, the three-field crop rotation system and fertilization with manure, all of which significantly increased productivity.
- œ Beyond the countryside, it resulted in the invention of time and labor-saving devices such as the printing press, water pumps for draining mines and gunpowder weapons.
- œ In turn, freedom from feudal obligations and a desire to move up the social ladder encouraged many peasants to move to towns and engage in crafts and trades.
- œ The more successful ones became wealthier and constituted a new middle class.

- œ They could now afford more of the luxury goods that could be obtained only from beyond Europe’s frontiers, and this stimulated both long-distance trade and the more efficient three-masted ships needed to engage in that trade.
- œ The new middle class’s increasing wealth also stimulated patronage of the arts, science, literature and philosophy.
- œ The result was an explosion of cultural and intellectual creativity – what we now call the **Renaissance**.

Our present future

- œ None of this is to argue that the still-ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will have similarly earth-shattering outcomes.
- œ The mortality rate of COVID-19 is nothing like that of the plagues discussed above, and therefore the consequences may not be as seismic.
- œ In a similar fashion, COVID-19 may be accelerating an already ongoing geopolitical shift in the balance of power between the U.S. and China.
- œ During the pandemic, China has taken the global lead in providing medical assistance to other countries as part of its **“Health Silk Road” initiative**.
- œ Some argue that the combination of America’s failure to lead and China’s relative success at picking up the slack may well be turbo charging China’s rise to a position of global leadership.
- œ Finally, COVID-19 seems to be accelerating the unraveling of long-established patterns and practices of work, with repercussions that could affect the future of office towers, big cities and mass transit, to name just a few.
- œ The implications of this and related economic developments may prove as profoundly transformative as those triggered by the **Black Death** in 1347.

CONCLUSION:

- œ Ultimately, the longer-term consequences of this pandemic – like all previous pandemics – are simply unknowable to those who must endure them. But just as past plagues made the world we currently inhabit, so too will this pandemic likely remake the one populated by our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

ON THE QUAD, DEFINE THE IDEA, CHART A PATH

CONTEXT

The third round of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprising India, Japan, the US and Australia is to take place.

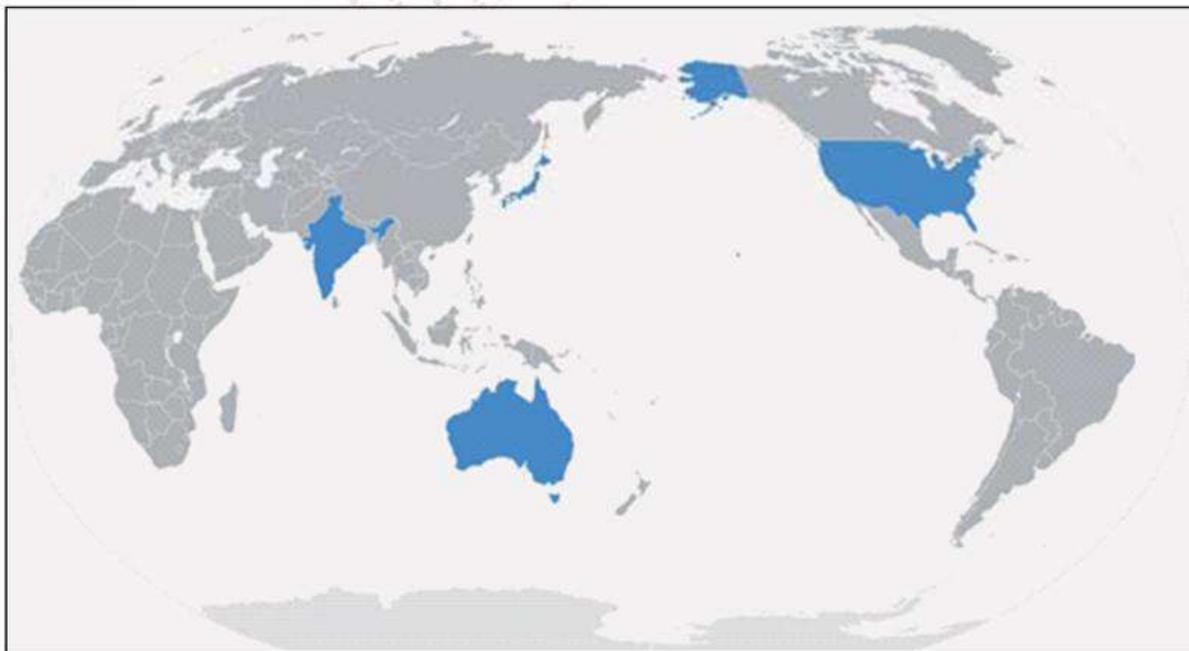
◎ BACKGROUND:

- œ India, Japan, Australia and the US have been coordinating a joint approach on “free, open, prosperous and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region, based on shared values and principles and respect for international law.
- œ After being moribund for a decade, the Quad was revived last November, ostensibly as a hedge against the spread of China’s influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- œ The Quad’s previous iteration died a quiet death when then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd backed out due to concerns that it would antagonize China.
- œ This time around, it is New Delhi, which has deferred to Beijing’s sensibilities.
- œ In April, it was alone in rejecting Australia’s request to participate in the Malabar military exercises with the other Quad members. That rejection came the day after an informal summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Wuhan.

◎ ANALYSIS:

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

- œ The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD, also known as the Quad) is an informal strategic forum between-
 - > The United States
 - > Japan
 - > Australia
 - > India
- œ It is maintained by semi-regular summits, information exchanges and military drills between member countries.
- œ The forum was initiated as a dialogue in 2007 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, with the support of Vice President Dick Cheney of the US, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India.
- œ The dialogue was paralleled by joint military exercises of an unprecedented scale, titled Exercise Malabar.



Significance of Quad:

- œ **Matrix of relationship:** It's helpful to examine the Quad less as a bloc of four countries and more as a matrix of trilateral and bilateral relationships.
- œ **Strong engagements:** Trilaterally, **US–Japan–Australia** engagement is the most advanced, given the legacy of US alliances and the recently unveiled trilateral infrastructure agreement.
 - > Meanwhile, the US–India–Japan trilateral dialogue is now held at the ministerial level
 - > Japan has been permanently included in India–US naval exercises, and a trilateral infrastructure working group has been established
 - > A Japan–India–Australia trilateral dialogue was recently initiated.
- œ **Growing minilateralism:** Other developments point to growing 'minilateralism'. India's air force participated in Australia's Pitch Black exercise, representing a growing degree of comfort with defence cooperation in a regional context. The commonality of equipment—notably maritime patrol aircraft—is significant for improving collective maritime domain awareness and anti-submarine contingencies, and adds another element of interoperability.
- œ **Major defence platforms:** After more than a decade of negotiations, a logistics supply agreement and communications agreement have been signed. India has also acquired several major defence platforms from the US, and preliminary efforts at joint defence production and research and development are underway.

Quad as plurilateral mechanism

- œ The Chinese are skilled at obfuscation. They will, perhaps, endeavour to conflate the Quad with the Indo-Pacific vision, and link both to the so-called China Containment Theory.

- œ The Quad nations need to better explain that the Indo-Pacific Vision is an overarching framework that is being discussed in a transparent manner, with the objective of advancing everyone's economic and security interests.
- œ The Quad, on the other hand, is a plurilateral mechanism between countries that share interest on specific matters.

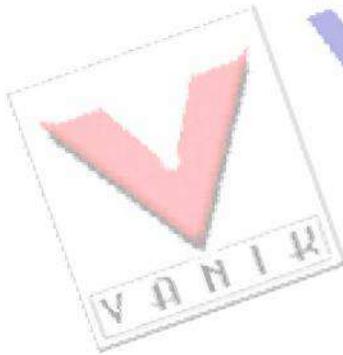
The forthcoming Ministerial meeting as an opportunity

- œ This time around, the four countries are navigating through more turbulent waters. The global pandemic and the faltering global economy are taking a toll on the region's growth and prosperity.
- œ The two major Pacific powers (China and America), are moving into a more adversarial phase of their relationship. Public opinion about China in all four countries is different from what it used to be in 2007.
- œ The fact of the meeting itself will signal to China that assertive or aggressive behaviour is not going to derail this mechanism.
- œ A positive agenda built around collective action in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, monitoring shipping for search and rescue or anti-piracy operations, infrastructure assistance to climatically vulnerable states, connectivity initiatives and similar activities, will re-assure the littoral States that the Quad will be a factor for regional benefit, and a far cry from Chinese allegations that it is some sort of a military alliance.

© CONCLUSION:

- œ The forthcoming Ministerial meeting will be an opportunity to define the idea and chart a future path. Needless provocation of China should be avoided. There is no gain in actions that anger the Chinese with no commensurate benefit to the others.

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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INDIA'S SANDALWOOD TREES FACING THREAT FROM SANDALWOOD SPIKE DISEASE

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- India's sandalwood trees, the country's pride — particularly of Karnataka — are facing a serious threat with the return of the destructive Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD).

◎ **ABOUT:**

What is Sandalwood Spike Disease?

- Sandalwood Spike Disease is an infectious disease caused by **phytoplasma**.
 - œ Phytoplasmas are **bacterial parasites** of plant tissues.
 - œ They are transmitted by **insect vectors** and involved in **plant-to-plant transmission**.
- SSD has been one of the major causes for the decline in sandalwood production in the country for over a century.
- The disease was first reported in Kodagu in 1899.
 - œ More than a million sandalwood trees were removed in the Kodagu and Mysuru region between 1903 and 1916.
 - œ Later 98,734 trees were extracted during 1917-1925 in Salem also due to SSD.
- The devastating impact in natural habitats resulted in sandalwood being classified as "**vulnerable**" by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature** in 1998.

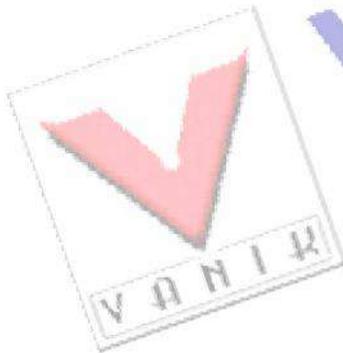
Is there any cure?

- There is no cure as of now for the infection.
- The infected tree will have to be cut down to prevent the spread of the disease.

Sandalwood distribution in India

In India, sandalwood is grown in around 9,000 sqkm, of which 8,200 sqkm is in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

State (Area-Sq. KM)	Location
Karnataka (5245)	Districts of Shimoga, Chikkamagalur, Coorg, Hassan, Mysore, Chamarajnagar, Dharwad, Bangalore, Kolar, Belgaum, Uttara Kannada, Dakshina Kannada, Bellary and Tumkur
Tamil Nadu (3040)	Districts of Salem, Dharamapuri Erode, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, the Nilgiris, Villupuram and to a certain extent in Madurai, Virudhunagar and Tirunelveli
Kerala (15)	Marayoor Range and to a limited extent in Arienkavu Range
Andhra Pradesh (200)	Anantapur, Chittoor and Kadapa, Tirumala Hills and Paderu Forest Division of Arakku valley
Odisha (25)	Jeypore and Rayagada forest divisions of Komput district
Madhya Pradesh (33)	Forests of Seoni, Sagar, Sehore, Mandsaur, Dewas, Guna and Rewa forest divisions



Maharashtra (33)	Ahmednagar, Latur, Buldana, Washim, Amravati, Osmanabad, Beed, Pune and Satara
Rajasthan (sparse)	Udaipur, Rajsamand, Chittorgarh, Pratapgarh, Pali, Sirohi, Banswara, Dungarpur, Jhalawar, Ajmer and Karoli forest divisions

- India has been the traditional leader of sandalwood oil production for perfumery and pharmaceuticals.
- As early as 1792, Tippu Sultan had declared it a 'Royal Tree' of Mysuru.
- The price of Indian sandalwood and its oil has risen significantly since 1995 at a rate of 20% annually mainly due to depletion in production.
- The much-loved and much-valued tree now faces a threat to its existence from SSD.

DOMESTIC SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT INSURERS (D-SIIs)

- CONTEXT:**
 - The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC) and The New India Assurance Co have been identified as Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs) for 2020-21 by insurance regulator IRDAI.

- ABOUT:**

What are D-SIIs?

- D-SIIs refer to insurers of such size, market importance and domestic and global inter-connectedness whose distress or failure would cause a significant dislocation in the domestic financial system.
- D-SIIs are perceived as insurers that are 'too big or too important to fail'. This perception and the perceived expectation of government support will amplify risk taking, reduce market discipline, create competitive distortions, and increase the possibility of distress in the future.

Methodology for identification & supervision of D-SIIs

- In order to identify too-big-to-fail insurers and to put such insurers to enhanced monitoring mechanism, IRDAI has developed a methodology for identification and supervision of D-SIIs.
- The parameters include-

- > the size of operations in terms of total revenue, including premium underwritten and the value of assets under management
- > global activities across more than one jurisdiction
- > lack of substitutability of their products and/or operations

- . The continued functioning of D-SIIs is critical for the uninterrupted availability of insurance services to the national economy.

The new D-SIIs

- . **Largest insurer:** LIC is the largest insurer in the country with a balance sheet of Rs 31.2 lakh crore.
- . **Sole reinsurer:** GIC Re is the country's sole reinsurer.
- . **Largest general insurance company:** New India is the country's largest general insurance company.

GIC Re and New India are listed insurers while LIC is in the process of listing on the stock exchanges through a disinvestment by the government. All three entities are owned by the government.

About IRDAI

- . Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) has been set up as autonomous body under the IRDA Act, 1999.
- . IRDAI regulates the Indian insurance industry to protect the interests of the policyholders and work for the orderly growth of the industry.
- . **IRDAI's Mission:** To protect the interests of policyholders, to regulate, promote and ensure orderly growth of the insurance industry and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

What will they do as 'D-SIIs'?

- . **Raise the level of corporate governance:** As D-SIIs, the three insurers LIC, GIC Re and New India have been asked to raise the level of corporate governance.
- . **Identify risk & promote management culture:** These insurers also have to identify all relevant risk and promote a sound risk management culture.
- . **Enhance regulatory supervision:** These D-SIIs will also be subjected to enhanced regulatory supervision during this period.

HEALTH IN INDIA: MoSPI

◎ CONTEXT:

- . The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has released the report of a survey titled 'Health in India', whose main objective was to gather basic quantitative information on India's health sector.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- . The report is released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- . It details aspects of the role played by government and private sector facilities.
- . It also contains health information for separate religious communities, including estimates of their susceptibility to ailments.
- . The report is based on information collected through **NSS Schedule 25.0 (Household Social Consumption: Health)** spread over the entire Indian Union.

- Data were collected through a sample survey of 1.13 lakh households covering 5.55 lakh persons.

How 'healthy' is India?

- Around 7.5 percent of Indians reported that they were suffering from ailments.
- The difference in people suffering from ailments in rural and urban India was stark.
 - œ **rural India**- 6.8 per cent
 - œ **urban India**- 9.1 per cent

Which religious group is the most prone to illness?

- The **Zoroastrian community** remains the most susceptible to ailments. This number for other communities is:
 - œ **Jains**- 11.2 per cent
 - œ **Sikhs**- 11 per cent
 - œ **Christians**- 10.5 per cent
 - œ **Muslims**- 8.1 per cent œ **Buddhists**- 8 per cent œ **Hindus**- 7.2 per cent

What is Ailment?

- The survey defines ailment as any **deviation from a person's state of physical and mental well-being.**
- The '**Proportion of Persons who Responded as Ailing' or PPRA**, in a 15-day period when they were approached by the surveyors, were registered as those suffering from ailments.

Division in terms of sex

Religion	Male	Female	Person
Hindu	65	79	72
Muslim	70	93	81
Christian	89	122	105
Sikh	94	127	110
Jain	109	115	112
Buddhist	45	113	80
Zoroastrian	257	359	311
Others	83	54	69
All	67	83	75

- Women remain more susceptible to suffering from ailments than men.
 - œ In rural India 6.1 per cent of males said that they were suffering from ailments, while 7.6 per cent of rural women said the same.

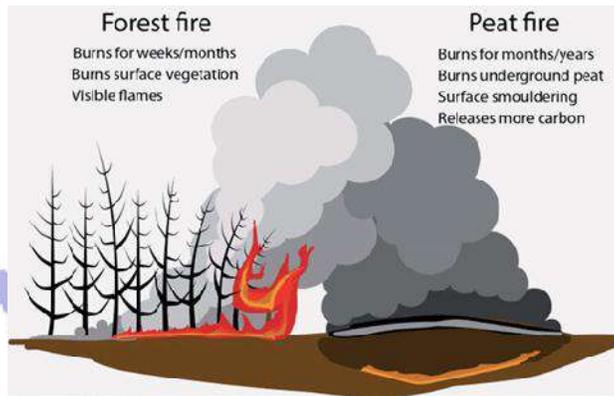
While 8.2 per cent of urban males said that they were sick, 10 per cent urban females said the same

‘ZOMBIE FIRES’ DISCOVERED IN ARCTIC AS CLIMATE CHANGE INTRODUCES NEW FUEL

- **CONTEXT:**
 - Fire scientists are warning of ‘zombie fires’, or holdover fires, in the Arctic, an area not known for large fires or substantial fire fuel.

- **ABOUT:** **What are Zombie fires?**

- Zombie fires occur when a fire from a previous year smolders in **carbon-rich peat (organic fuel)** underground during the winter, then re-ignite on the surface as the weather warms and the ground thaws the next season.



This can lead to even more burning the following year.

- The process is made worse as peat and permafrost, both carbon *sinks* which act to hold and store carbon, now become a carbon *source*.
- Emissions increase as both the burning of vegetation *and* burning of peat/permafrost release CO₂ into the atmosphere, furthering our planet's warming.

Why is a ‘zombie fire’ dangerous?

- Zombie fires are part of a dangerous “feedback loop”.
- The growing number of extreme wildfires in the Arctic are unprecedented in the past 10,000 years.
- These fires can burn underground for years, thawing permafrost and releasing huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, creating feedback loops resulting in accelerated warming and more thawing permafrost.
- The combination of wildfires and permafrost thaw can cause loss of life, landslides, floods, and coastal erosion threatening Arctic communities, infrastructure and wildlife.

What needs to be done?

- **Proper understanding:** There is need to understand the nature of fires in the Arctic which are evolving and changing rapidly.
- **International cooperation:** There is also an urgent need for global cooperation, investment and action in monitoring fires.
- **Traditional learning:** The study called for learning from the indigenous peoples of the Arctic about how fire was traditional used.
- **New approaches:** New permafrost- and peat-sensitive approaches to wildland fire fighting are needed to save the Arctic.

MAHARASHTRA MODIFIED FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006

◎ CONTEXT:

- In order to bring a major relief to forest-dwelling families, Maharashtra Government has modified the Forest Rights Act, 2006 that will enable forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwelling families to build houses in the neighborhood forest areas.

◎ ABOUT:

Scheduled Areas in India

- As per the Constitutional provision under **Article 244 (1)** of the Constitution of India, the 'Scheduled Areas' are defined as '**such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas**' – as per **paragraph 6(1)** of the **Fifth Schedule** of the Constitution of India.
- At present, Scheduled Areas have been declared in the States of Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- Criteria for declaring Scheduled Area
 - œ The criteria for declaring any area as a "Scheduled Area" under the Fifth Schedule are:
 - œ Preponderance of tribal population,
 - œ Compactness and reasonable size of the area,
 - œ A viable administrative entity such as a district, block or taluk, and
 - œ Economic backwardness of the area as compared to the neighbouring areas.

Schedule 5th of the Constitution

- The current notification has been issued by the Governor using his powers under subparagraph (1) of paragraph 5 of the **Schedule V** of the Constitution.
- The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas as well as of Scheduled Tribes residing in any State other than the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Governor of each State having Scheduled Areas (SA) shall annually, or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of Scheduled Areas in that State.

Significance of the step

- The amendment will importantly prevent the migration of forest dwelling families outside the native villages and provide them with housing areas by extending the village site into forest land in their neighbourhood.
- It is likely to provide a major relief to STs and other traditional forest-dwelling families living in the scheduled areas of the state.



ICMR WARNS INDIA OF 'CAT QUE VIRUS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Even as the world is still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) scientists have found another virus, the 'Cat Que Virus,' reported mainly in China.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**

What is Cat Que Virus?

- . CQV belongs to the **Simbu serogroup** and infects both humans and economically important livestock species.
- . One of the arthropod-borne viruses (arboviruses), the CQV may cause febrile illnesses, meningitis, and paediatric encephalitis among humans.
- . **Natural host:** Its natural host is a mosquito. Domestic pigs are the primary mammalian host of CQV and anti-CQV IgM and IgG antibodies have been reported in swine reared locally in China.

Antibodies against the virus

- . Antibodies against the virus have been reported in swine reared locally in China.
- . It indicates that the virus has formed a "natural cycle" in the local area and has the ability to spread in pigs and other animal populations through mosquitoes.

Why India is in danger?

- . The virus has been spotted in culex mosquitoes and pigs across China and Vietnam. India, too is home to species of culex mosquitoes.
- . According to the ICMR study, Indian mosquitoes are susceptible to CQV, which could also become a public health pathogen.

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN FIGHT OVER DISPUTED NAGORNO-KARABAKH

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**

- One of the world's oldest conflicts, a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has re-erupted with the heaviest clashes in years.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**

What is Nagorno-Karabakh region?

- . Nagorno-Karabakh is the subject of an unresolved dispute between Azerbaijan, in which it lies, and its ethnic Armenian majority, backed by neighbouring Armenia.
- . A mountainous region of about 4,400 sq km (1,700 sq miles)
- . Traditionally inhabited by Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks.
- . In Soviet times, it became an autonomous region within the republic of Azerbaijan
- . Internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, but majority of population is ethnic Armenian



- . An estimated one million people displaced by 1990s war, and about 30,000 killed
- . Separatist forces captured some extra territory around the enclave in Azerbaijan in the 1990s war
- . Stalemate has largely prevailed since a 1994 ceasefire
- . Russia has traditionally been seen as an ally of the Armenians

The Conflict

- . Since 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at odds over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- . The land is an ethnic Arminian enclave with Azerbaijan and it lies approximately 50 kilometres from the Armenian border.
- . The region has been out of control of Azerbaijan since the end of the war in 1994, however, both the sides have a heavy military presence along a demilitarized zone separating the region from the rest of the country.
- . Additionally, local soldiers backed by Armenia also occupy some Azerbaijani territory outside the region.

Role of Russia and Turkey

- . Russia and Turkey are two key players.

Turkey with Azerbaijan

- . Turkey, which wants to play a key role in the Caucasus' affairs, has extended its support to oil-rich and Turkic-speaking country, Azerbaijan.
- . During World War I, roughly 1.5 million Armenians were massacred by Turkey under the Ottoman Empire. Some scholars call the mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as the first genocide of the 20th century.
- . Turkey, however, denies the charge and refuses to recognise World War I killings of Armenians as genocide.
- . Due to Turkey's denial, the ties between Yerevan and Ankara are very cold.

Russia with Armenia

- . Russia shares close ties with Armenia.
- . Russia also leads the **Collective Security Treaty Organization**, the military alliance of former Soviet states that includes Armenia.
- . A look at the ties between the two countries suggests that Russia needs Armenia as much as Armenia needs Russia.
 - œ Azerbaijan's spending on arms exceeds Armenia's defence budget, making Yerevan dependent on Russia's support and military guarantees.
 - œ The geopolitical and strategic importance of Azerbaijan pulls Russia's attention to the country (Armenia).
 - œ In order to keep [its former republic] in its orbit, Russia appears to chasten Azerbaijan with Armenia.

PAKISTAN TO ELEVATE GILGIT-BALTISTAN TO FULL-FLEDGED PROVINCE WITH ALL CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

◎ CONTEXT:

- Pakistan has decided to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan's status to that of a full-fledged province.

● **ABOUT:**

- The region was part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and is claimed by India.
- Gilgit-Baltistan is located between Karakoram and Himalayas world's highest mountains. It's home to K-2, the second tallest mountain in the world.
- During the first Indo-Pak war of October 1947, Pakistan occupied 78,114 sq km of the land of Jammu and Kashmir, including the 'Northern Areas'.
 - œ The Northern Areas is the other name of Gilgit-Baltistan that Pakistan has used for administrative reasons because it was a disputed territory.

Governance of the Region

- The political nature of Gilgit-Baltistan has been directionless from the beginning.
- Pakistan initially governed the region directly from the central authority after it was separated from 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' on April 28, 1949.
- In 1963, Pakistan gave away 5,180 sq km of the region to China, despite local protests.
- Pakistan passed the **Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order** in 2009, which granted "self-rule" to the 'Northern Areas'.
- Pakistan signed an agreement with China for mega infrastructure and hydel power projects in September 2009.
- In 2019, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan took up the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan.
- Over the years, the region has acquired a government and a council, which gave it a de facto status of a province of Pakistan, but the constitutional status of the region remained vague without explicit statehood.

What's India's take on the issue?

- India has clearly conveyed to Pakistan that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of the country by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession.
- India has said the Government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no **locus standi** on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it.
- India completely rejects such actions and continued attempts to bring material changes in Pakistan occupied areas of the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Instead, Pakistan should immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation.

MCI DISSOLVED, NATIONAL MEDICAL COMMISSION COMES INTO EXISTENCE

● **CONTEXT:**

- **The National Medical Commission (NMC) came into existence, as the Centre dissolved the six-decade-old Indian Medical Council Act 1956.**

● **ABOUT:**

- The National Medical Commission has been set up as the country's apex regulator of medical education and profession.
- **Composition:** Dr Suresh Chandra Sharma, retired HoD, ENT, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, has been appointed as the Chairman of the NMC for a period of three years
 - œ Apart from the Chairman, the NMC will consist of 10 ex-officio members and 22 part-time members appointed by the Central government.

Modalities for Exit Test to be worked out

- . National Exit Test, once finalised, will serve as PG entrance even to institutes of national importance like AIIMS, PGI & JIPMER
- . The NMC is now set to draft the uniform national pattern for MBBS final-year exams to ensure the same level of skills in MBBS graduates all over India
- . Plans afoot to scrap existing system of annual renewal permissions for institutes

Autonomous Boards

- . The Centre has formed four autonomous boards under the NMC Act---
 - œ Under-Graduate Medical Education Board (UGMEB)
 - œ Post-Graduate Medical Education Board (PGMEB)
 - œ Medical Assessment and Rating Board
 - œ Ethics and Medical Registration Board

Functions of NMC:

- . To lay down policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals.
- . To assess the requirements of human resources and infrastructure in healthcare.
- . To ensure compliance by the State Medical Councils with the regulations made under the Bill.
- . To frame guidelines for determination of fee for up to 50% of the seats in the private medical institutions.

 **© BACKGROUND:**

- In 2018, it was decided that the MCI will be dissolved and a new body will take its place, after which the National Medical Commission Act, 2019 was passed in August 2019.
- The change was aimed at bringing in reforms in medical education towards a transparent, qualitative and accountable system.
- The basic change is that the regulator is now 'selected' on merit, as opposed to an 'elected' regulator.
- The government dissolved the MCI in 2018, replaced it with a BoG, which was chaired by Dr. VK Paul, member (health), NITI Aayog.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 2 (OCTOBER, 2020)

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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TRIPS AGREEMENT

CONTEXT

India and South Africa have presented a draft proposal to the World Trade Organization (WTO) for waiver of some provisions of its TRIPS Agreement on intellectual property (IP) protection to fight the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; it might be a good move, but begs a few questions.

◎ **BACKGROUND:**

- œ On October 2, WTO published the text of a joint submission by the two countries to the WTO TRIPS Council, seeking the waiver for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19.
- œ It was welcomed by public health activists who have been at the vanguard of the struggle to provide access to medicines.
- œ They have always held that patents are the major block to providing inexpensive medicines.
- œ With the SARS-CoV-2 virus wreaking havoc across the world, the World Health Organization had put together the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP).
- œ It is an initiative of Costa Rica aimed at making vaccines, tests, treatments and other health technologies accessible to all to fight the pandemic.
- œ Launched at May-end, it garnered the support of 30 countries and a clutch of international partners and institutions. But beyond the high-sounding rhetoric, nothing concrete has come of it.
- œ The India-South Africa initiative comes as COVID-19 cases are nudging 35.35 million (October 6, 2020) and fatalities have crossed one million.

◎ **ANALYSIS:**

What is in the Joint Submission?

- œ The decision to make the joint submission was taken with the objective of making Covid drugs and vaccines "affordable as well as accessible" for developing and least-developed countries or LDCs, as they are referred to in trade parlance.
- œ The idea is to ensure that Covid drugs and vaccines, once available in the market, should not come under "unnecessary" regulation that delays their procurement.
- œ Under the joint submission, India has sought removal, or waiver, of Sections 1, 4, 5, and 7 of Part II of the TRIPS Agreement that pertain to copyright, industrial designs, patents and protection of undisclosed information or trade secrets, for drugs and vaccines aimed at Covid-19.

What is the need of waiver?

- œ There were several reports about intellectual property rights hindering or potentially hindering the timely provisioning of affordable medical products to Covid-19 patients.
- œ A particular concern for countries with insufficient or no manufacturing capacity were the requirements for the cumbersome and lengthy process of the import and export of pharmaceutical products.
 - > The variation in the price of **Remdesivir** which costs less than USD 1 but is sold in India between Rs 4,000 and Rs 5,400 as an example of how licenses incapacitate Indian companies to supply in middle-income countries.
- œ Various initiatives to facilitate access to medical products for Covid-19 responses such as ACT-Accelerator, COVAX facility or CTAP so far failed to ensure technology transfer and local production.
- œ Instead of facilitating technology transfer, ACT-Accelerator and COVAX Facility reinforce the IP regime and delay the disseminating of technology

TRIPS Agreement

- œ The TRIPS Agreement has been in force since 1995 and is to date the most comprehensive multilateral agreement on intellectual property.
- œ The TRIPS Agreement introduced global minimum standards for protecting and enforcing nearly all forms of intellectual property rights (IPR), including those for patents.
- œ International conventions prior to TRIPS did not specify minimum standards for patents. At the time that negotiations began, over 40 countries in the world did not grant patent protection for pharmaceutical products.
- œ The TRIPS Agreement now requires all WTO members, with few exceptions, to adapt their laws to the minimum standards of IPR protection.
- œ In addition, the TRIPS Agreement also introduced detailed obligations for the enforcement of intellectual property rights.

WTO members & compulsion

- . The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
- . As in 2020, WTO has 164 members and 24 observer governments.
- . In becoming Members of the WTO, countries undertake to adhere to the 18 specific agreements annexed to the Agreement establishing the WTO.
- . They cannot choose to be party to some agreements but not others (with the exception of a few "plurilateral" agreements that are not obligatory).

Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement

- œ In **November 2001**, WTO members adopted the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which is categorical that every member has the right to grant compulsory licences (CLs) and the freedom to determine the grounds upon which such licences are granted.

- œ The Doha Declaration did not require any amendment to the text of the TRIPS accord because the grounds for CLs were listed in the original text. The Declaration merely served to reinforce that logic.
- œ India, as the leader of the developing world, was expected to make full use of these provisions.
- œ But it has been loath to do so for fear of upsetting the US and other big trading partners.
- œ After issuing one CL in 2008, it has stepped back and refused to issue any more.
- œ This is despite the urgent need to provide life-saving drugs at a reasonable cost to a people who are forced to bear the brunt of medical expenses.

© CONCLUSION:

- œ India will have to do some hard-nosed diplomacy here to swing the proposal its way. If accepted, this proposal will be historic and enable countries to access Covid medicines and vaccines easily, as and when they are available.



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CHINA'S CLIMATE COMMITMENT- SIGNIFICANT IS IT FOR THE EARTH, AND FOR INDIA

CONTEXT

Xi Jinping has promised China would be carbon net-zero by 2060, and apparently advanced the deadline for reaching emissions peak.

◎ ABOUT:

- œ It's that time of the year when countries start preparing for negotiations at the year-ending UN climate change conference. This year, the conference is not happening because of the pandemic.
- œ But, recently China made an unexpected announcement that ensured that there was no lack of climate change excitement this season.
- œ Speaking at the UN General Assembly, Chinese President Xi Jinping made two promises that came as a welcome surprise to climate change watchers.

Announcement of China

- œ First, Xi said, China would become carbon net-zero by the year 2060. Net-zero is a state in which a country's emissions are compensated by absorptions and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Absorption can be increased by creating more carbon sinks such as forests, while removal involves application of technologies such as carbon capture and storage.
- œ Second, the Chinese President announced a small but important change in China's already committed target for letting its emissions "peak", from "by 2030" to "before 2030". That means China would not allow its greenhouse gas emissions to grow beyond that point. Xi did not specify how soon "before 2030" means, but even this much is being seen as a very positive move from the world's largest emitter.

Importance of net-zero target

- œ For the last couple of years, there has been a concerted campaign to get countries, especially the big emitters, to commit themselves to achieve "climate neutrality" by 2050.
- œ This is sometimes referred to as the state of net-zero emissions that would require countries to significantly reduce their emissions, while increasing land or forest sinks that would absorb the emissions that do take place.

- œ If the sinks are not adequate, countries can commit themselves to deploying technologies that physically remove carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Most of such carbon dioxide removal technologies are still unproven and extremely expensive.
- œ Scientists and climate change campaign groups say global carbon neutrality by 2050 is the only way to achieve the Paris Agreement target of keeping global temperatures from rising beyond 2°C compared to pre-industrial times. At the current rate of emissions, the world is headed for a 3° to 4°C rise in temperatures by 2100.

Significance of China's commitment

- œ China is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. It accounts for almost 30% of global emissions, more than the combined emissions in the United States, the European Union and India, the three next biggest emitters.
- œ Getting China to commit itself to a net-zero target, even if it is 10 years later than what everyone has in mind, is a big breakthrough, especially since countries have been reluctant to pledge themselves to such long term commitments.
- œ So far, the European Union was the only big emitter to have committed itself to a net-zero emission status by 2050. More than 70 other countries have also made similar commitments but most of them have relatively low emissions because of which their net-zero status would not help the planet's cause in a big way.
- œ The real heavyweights whose climate actions are crucial to achieving the Paris Agreement targets are the Big Four — China, the US, the European Union and India — who together account for more than half the global emissions, followed by countries such as Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Japan and Australia.
- œ A week earlier, South Africa declared its intention to become carbon-neutral by 2050, but other countries have been holding back. The United States, under the Donald Trump administration,

has walked out of the Paris Agreement, and does not even believe in these targets.

India's commitment

- œ India has resisted pressure to make a long-term commitment, citing the fact that developed countries had utterly failed in keeping their past promises, and never delivered on the commitments they made earlier. India has also been arguing that the climate change actions it has been taking are, in relative terms, far more robust than those of the developed countries.
- œ Until now, China had been making more or less similar arguments as India. The two countries have historically played together at the climate change negotiations, even though vast differences have emerged in their emissions and development status in the last couple of decades.
- œ Therefore, China's decision is a big shot in the arm for the success of Paris Agreement. According to Climate Action Tracker, a global group that offers scientific analysis on actions being taken by countries, the Chinese goal, if realised, would lower global warming projections for 2100 by about 0.2° to 0.3°C, the most impactful single action ever taken by any country.

Implications of China's commitment for India

- œ The Chinese announcement is naturally expected to increase pressure on India to follow suit, and agree to some long-term commitment even if it was not exactly 2050 net-zero goal. That is something that India is unlikely to do.
- œ Earlier this year, India was in the process of formulating a long-term climate policy for itself, but that effort seems to have been shelved as of now.
- œ Another side-effect of the Chinese decision could be an increased divergence in the positions of India and China at the climate negotiations. China might now have fewer grounds to align itself with India as a developing country.

CONCLUSION:

- œ China's President Xi Jinping has indeed surprised the global community recently by committing his country to net-zero emissions by 2060. However, it remains to be seen whether China's climate promise is genuine, or simply a ploy to win international favour.



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THE USUAL STUBBLE BURNING PROBLEM

CONTEXT

Delhi's overall air quality, which currently lies in the 'moderate' category, is all set to deteriorate in the coming days due to a spike in stubble burning activity across northwest India and other meteorological conditions.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- œ Every year, a choking smog descends on northwest India as the region's farmers burn their fields following the rice harvest - a phenomenon that has helped make New Delhi one of the world's most polluted cities.
- œ The states surrounding Delhi are known collectively as the "grain bowl" of India after the agricultural sector underwent a **green revolution** in the **1960s**, leading to a dramatic increase in rice and wheat productivity.
 - > In Haryana alone, 80% of the almost 5 million hectares of land is now under cultivation, producing over 13 million tons of grain per year.
- œ But as production grew, the sector could not keep up with an increasing demand for labor, with farmers eventually abandoning hand harvesting in favor of less labor-intensive methods such as the combine harvester.
- œ Unlike manual harvesting techniques however, combine harvesters leave behind rice stubble, which prevents machines from sowing wheat seeds.
- œ With as little as 10 days between rice harvesting season and the sowing of wheat, farmers often turn to stubble burning to quickly remove the remaining rice crop residue.
- œ When farmers are unable to move the loose residue, they are left with no option except burning.

◎ ANALYSIS:

What is Stubble Burning?

- œ Stubble burning is, quite simply, **the act of removing paddy crop residue from the field to sow wheat.**
- œ It's usually required in areas that use the 'combine harvesting' method which leaves crop residue behind.
 - > Combines are machines that harvest, thresh i.e separate the grain, and also clean the separated grain, all at once.
- œ The problem, however, is that the machine doesn't cut close enough to the ground, leaving stubble behind that the farmer has no use for.

- œ There is pressure on the farmer to sow the next crop in time for it to achieve a full yield. The quickest and cheapest solution, therefore, is to clear the field by burning the stubble.

Spike in stubble burning

- œ Stubble burning remains a persistent contributor to Delhi's high pollution levels, causing a smog-like situation in Delhi-NCR every year post autumn and creating a health hazard for its residents.
- œ A sharp increase in stubble burning fires was observed around Punjab, Haryana, and neighbouring border regions," as per **SAFAR**.
- œ The first two weeks of paddy harvesting that started from September third week this year saw the number of stubble burning cases across Punjab rise to a whopping 1,206!
- œ This is almost five times the number of cases (264) recorded during the Kharif harvest of 2019 in the corresponding time period.
- œ SAFAR added that the boundary layer wind direction has remained favourable for the transportation of stubble smoke into the landlocked capital, and hence, the stubble fires are expected to start impacting Delhi's atmosphere in the days to come.
- œ For the rest of the ongoing week, however, SAFAR forecast indicates Delhi's AQI will deteriorate marginally but remain in the moderate category nevertheless.

What happens every year?

- œ According to a 2018 study conducted by **The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI)**, the major sources of pollution in Delhi in the summer include:
 - > dust and construction activities (38-42 per cent)
 - > transport (15-17 per cent)
 - > industry (22 per cent)
- œ However, as the winter approaches, farmers in Punjab and Haryana begin to clear out the paddy residue on their farmlands by setting it on fire.
- œ The particulate matter from these fires travels down the **entire Gangetic plain**, enveloping vast swaths of northern India in smoke.

- œ Cities like Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon, which are already choked with pollution from vehicles and industries that operate year-round, bear the brunt, as their meteorological conditions prevent the smoke from dissipating.
- œ As winter sets in, the cold makes it harder for the particulate matter to rise up — leaving people exposed to the toxic smog.
- œ The festival of Diwali introduces more pollutants as people light firecrackers.
- œ Between 2016 and 2018, Delhi pollution levels did dip by about 25 per cent, but the AQI numbers remained far higher than what is considered to be safe.
- œ According to a study by the Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi needs to cut its pollution levels further by 65 per cent to meet air quality standards.

Is it a crime?

- œ Burning crop residue is a crime under Section 188 of the IPC and under the Air and Pollution Control Act of 1981.
- œ However, government’s implementation lacks strength.

Assessing the impacts of Stubble Burning

- œ Burning crop residue directly contribute to environmental pollution, and are also responsible for the haze in Delhi and melting of Himalayan glaciers.
- œ One ton of residue contains 4-6 kg of nitrogen, 1-2 kg of phosphorus, and 15-20 kg of potassium.
- œ Besides causing air pollution, burning stubble also affects the fertility of the soil as it causes loss of nitrogen, sulphur, potassium and bacteriological content of the soil.
- œ The heat from burning paddy straw penetrates 1 centimetre into the soil, elevating the temperature to 33.8 to 42.2 degree Celsius. This kills the bacterial and fungal populations critical for a fertile soil.
- œ Burning of crop residue causes damage to other micro-organisms present in the upper layer of the soil as well as its organic quality. Due to the loss of ‘friendly’ pests, the wrath of ‘enemy’ pests has increased and as a result, crops are more prone to disease. The solubility capacity of the upper layers of soil have also been reduced.

Could new technology trigger a second revolution?

- œ India urgently needs to undergo a second, “evergreen” revolution, driven by technology such as the:

- > **happy seeder**, a machine which allows wheat to be sown on top of rice stubble
- > **the super sms (straw management system)**, a machine which attaches to the rear of a combine harvester to cut and spread loose residue across the field.

Important Artificial Machines

- . Happy Seeder(used for sowing of crop in standing stubble)
- . Rotavator (used for land preparation and incorporation of crop stubble in the soil)
- . Zero till seed drill (used for land preparations directly sowing of seeds in the previous crop stubble)
- . Baler (used for collection of straw and making bales of the paddy stubble)
- . Paddy Straw Chopper (cutting of paddy stubble for easily mixing with the soil)
- . Reaper Binder (used for harvesting paddy stubble and making into bundles)

- œ Agricultural productivity can be improved with the use of happy seeders and super sms machines by between 10 and 15%, by reducing labor costs and time and allowing nutrients from the crop residue to be recycled back into the soil.
- œ Instead of burning of the stubble, it can be used in different ways like cattle feed, compost manure, roofing in rural areas, biomass energy, mushroom cultivation, packing materials, fuel, paper, bio-ethanol and industrial production, etc.

What else can be done?

- œ Agriculture conservation should be promoted with “low lignocellulosic” crop residues such as rice, wheat and maize.
- œ Crop residue-based briquettes ought to be encouraged and thermal power plants in the vicinity ought to be encouraged to undertake co-firing of crop residues with coal.

⦿ **CONCLUSION:**

- œ The problem is complex and needs a solution. But the solution should take into consideration the economic condition of farmers, the scientific options available and the willingness of the Central government to change policy and fund a major part of the expenditure.

HATHRAS CASE- ISSUES OF CONSENT, RELIABILITY IN NARCO AND POLYGRAPH TESTS

A spokesperson for the Uttar Pradesh government recently said that **polygraph and narcoanalysis tests would be conducted** as part of the investigation into the alleged gangrape and murder of a 19-year old Dalit woman by four men of the Thakur caste in Hathras last month.

Polygraph and narcoanalysis tests

- œ A **polygraph test** is based on the assumption that physiological responses that are triggered when a person is lying are different from what they would be otherwise.
 - œ Instruments like cardio-cuffs or sensitive electrodes are attached to the person, and variables such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, change in sweat gland activity, blood flow, etc., are measured as questions are put to them.
 - œ A numerical value is assigned to each response to conclude whether the person is telling the truth, is deceiving, or is uncertain.
 - œ A test such as this is said to have been first done in the 19th century by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who used a machine to measure changes in the blood pressure of criminal suspects during interrogation. Similar devices were subsequently created by the American psychologist William Marston in 1914, and by the California police officer John Larson in 1921.
 - œ Narcoanalysis, by contrast, involves the injection of a drug, sodium pentothal, which induces a hypnotic or sedated state in which the subject's imagination is neutralised, and they are expected to divulge information that is true.
 - œ The drug, referred to as "truth serum" in this context, was used in larger doses as anaesthesia during surgery, and is said to have been used during World War II for intelligence operations.
 - œ More recently, investigating agencies have sought to employ these tests in investigation, and are sometimes seen as being a "softer alternative" to torture or "third degree" to extract the truth from suspects.
 - œ However, neither method has been proven scientifically to have a 100% success rate, and remain contentious in the medical field as well.
- and J M Panchal ruled that no lie detector tests should be administered "except on the basis of consent of the accused".
- œ Those who volunteer must have access to a lawyer, and have the physical, emotional, and legal implications of the test explained to them by police and the lawyer, the Bench said.
 - œ It said that the 'Guidelines for the Administration of Polygraph Test on an Accused' published by the National Human Rights Commission in 2000, must be strictly followed. The subject's consent should be recorded before a judicial magistrate, the court said.
 - œ The results of the tests cannot be considered to be "confessions", because those in a drugged-induced state cannot exercise a choice in answering questions that are put to them.
 - œ However, any information or material subsequently discovered with the help of such a voluntarily-taken test can be admitted as evidence, the court said.
 - œ Thus, if an accused reveals the location of a murder weapon in the course of the test, and police later find the weapon at that location, the statement of the accused will not be evidence, but the weapon will be.
 - œ The Bench took into consideration international norms on human rights, the right to a fair trial, and the right against self-incrimination under Article 20(3) of the Constitution.

Can people other than the accused in a criminal investigation — witnesses, victims, their families — through these tests?

- œ The Supreme Court had said in its order that "no individual should be forcibly subjected to any of the techniques in question, whether in the context of investigation in criminal cases or otherwise", and expanded the same rule to others who can be made to undergo the test only if they consent to it.
- œ It had said that forcing an individual to undergo these tests amounts to an "unwarranted intrusion into personal liberty", but had left scope for "voluntary administration" of these techniques if the individuals gave consent.
- œ The court examined the scope of Article 20(3), the right against self-incrimination, which states that no accused can be compelled to be a witness against himself.

Supreme Court's ruling on these tests

- œ In 'Selvi & Ors vs State of Karnataka & Anr' (2010), a Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan and Justices R V Raveendran

- œ It said that while this requires a person to be formally named as an accused, other provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code extend this protection to witnesses as well.
- œ With reference to victims, especially of sexual offences, the Bench said that irrespective of the need to expedite the probe in such cases, a victim of an offence cannot be forced to undergo these tests as it would be “an unjustified intrusion into mental privacy and could lead to further stigma for the victim”.

Criminal cases in recent years where these tests been used

- œ In most cases, investigating agencies seek permission for such tests to be done on accused or suspects, but rarely on victims or witnesses.
- œ Legal experts say that investigating agencies can submit to a court that the tests are being sought to help in their probe but consent or refusal to undergo the tests by an individual do not reflect innocence or guilt.
- œ Most recently, the CBI has sought to conduct these tests on the driver and helper of the truck that hit the Unnao rape victim in Uttar Pradesh in July last year. It also sought to conduct the tests on one accused in the Punjab National Bank alleged fraud case, but the court rejected the plea after the accused did not give consent.
- œ In May 2017, the founder of INX Media, Indrani Mukerjea, who is facing trial for the alleged murder of her daughter Sheena Bora in 2012, had offered to undergo the lie detector test, which was refused by the CBI, stating that they had sufficient evidence against her.
- œ The polygraph test was also conducted on Dr Rajesh Talwar and Dr Nupur Talwar, who were accused of killing their daughter Aayushi and help Hemraj in Noida.

Critical analysis of polygraph:

- œ The test does not tell as to whether the subject is lying or not. Results only show about the physiological changes which have to be interpreted by the expert.
- œ In asking the question no science is involved and it wholly depends upon trickery and on the expertise of the examiner.
- œ A person who can control his emotions to a great extent can still tell a lie, e.g., if a person has control on himself by practice of yoga or otherwise, this test is bound to fail.

- œ Nervousness may be exhibited by many innocent and truthful persons under the conditions of police interrogations. This nervousness may arise due to various reasons, e.g., fear of being involved in the crime, or the fear that his or her previous conduct may be shown to the police what is not related to the present crime.
- œ It may also be due to the fact of not properly understanding the procedure of polygraph, besides there may be fear of wrong interpretation of chart by the examiner and even the interrogator and examiner may be biased.
- œ If the examiner holds the subject guilty, he may interpret the chart with that bent of mind and vice versa he may be lenient in interpreting, chart of a person whom he considers innocent.

Critical analysis of brain mapping

- œ This test has its own limitations. The test is conducted by a human being and it is possible that they fail to fully and truthfully analyze the brain wave.
- œ An innocent person who has not committed the crime but has only witnesses of wound also react to the stimuli. Similarly, a person may be aware of the crime due to details published in media and the brain may store it. In that case also there chance is that the innocent can also be found guilty.
- œ Therefore, this tests utility is only to imprint the subject’s brain, which makes it clear that the subject is innocent.
- œ This technique is also criticized on the ground that it is violation of brain privacy. By this a person loses his right to keep his thought to himself.
- œ This is also not useful in case of a person who loses his memory, e.g., old people easily lose memory.

© CONCLUSION:

- œ As India is confronted with cross-border terrorism and a tough internal security scenario hence use of technologies are vital for the nation to deal with these challenges. However, rapidly and swiftly these scientific tools of investigation can become an alternate of third degree physical torture in police custody. As was rightly held by the Supreme Court in D. K. Basu v. State of West Bengal , that there is need for developing scientific methods of investigation and interrogation of accused as custodial deaths and torture is nothing but a blow at rule of law.

KEEPING VIGIL EVEN DURING UNUSUAL TIMES

CONTEXT

The latest India-specific data on COVID-19 infections is alarming. With the nation spending substantial resources to manage the pandemic, the role of the supreme audit institution of India, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has again been highlighted.

◎ **BACKGROUND:**

- œ The latest audit of the Union Government's accounts tabled in Parliament in September reveals that the Finance Ministry quietly retained over 40% of all cess collections in 2018-19 in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI).
- œ As many as 35 different cesses, levies and charges yielded Rs. 2.75-lakh crore in the year, but just around Rs. 1.64-lakh crore was remitted to the specific reserve funds for which these cesses were levied.
- œ This not only helped understate India's revenue and fiscal deficit numbers but also meant that the purposes for which Parliament approved such cesses — be it health, education or infrastructure development — were not met.
- œ The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has pointed out grave lapses in the accounting of revenue from the GST compensation cess.
- œ The CAG of India has, not for the first time, urged the Finance Ministry to take immediate corrective action.
- œ Over 10 years, not a paisa of the Rs. 1.25-lakh crore of cess collected on crude oil was transferred to an oil industry development body it was meant to finance.
- œ Part of the hefty cess collected as additional excise duties on petrol and diesel, ostensibly to finance roads and infrastructure, was similarly retained in the CFI.

◎ **ANALYSIS:**

- œ The CAG of India is an independent constitutional authority who is neither part of the legislature nor executive.
- œ **Appointment and removal:** He is appointed by the President under his hand and seal and can be removed only through a motion of **impeachment**.
- œ **Selection:** The constitution of India protects the independence of the CAG. However, there is no laid down criteria for selection of the CAG.
- œ **Dr B.R. Ambedkar** described the CAG as the **most important functionary under the constitution**.
- œ The CAG is the **Supreme Audit Institution** or SAI of India.
- œ The CAG is the instrument that ensures and promotes accountability of the executive to parliament.

- œ The CAG is an auditor to the government of India, which is headed by the prime minister.
- œ He is the guardian of the public purse and controls the financial system of the country both at the central level and state level.

Constitutional Provisions Related to CAG

- . **Part V**, Chapter V of the Constitution of India, talks about the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
- . **Article 148** speaks of the CAG, his appointment, the oath of his service.
- . **Article 149** broadly speaks of the duties and powers of the CAG.
- . **Article 150:** The accounts of the Union and States shall be kept in such form as the President may prescribe on the advice of the CAG.
- . **Article 151:** The reports of the CAG relating to the Union shall be submitted to the President. The reports of the CAG relating to the State shall be submitted to the Governor.

Historical Background of the Office

- œ The office of CAG started functioning from 1858, and the first Auditor General was appointed in 1860.
- œ However, statutory recognition to this institution was given by the **Government of India Act of 1935**, which provided for appointment of the **Auditor General** by the King of England, thereby cementing the independence enjoyed by the post in the years to follow.
- œ The constitution of free India included four articles (**148, 149, 150 and 151**) which define the basic structure of the institution of the CAG of India.

Mandate of CAG

- œ As envisaged in Article 149 of the Constitution, the Parliament enacted a detailed legislation called the CAG's Duties, Powers and Conditions Act in 1971 which describes his mandate and puts almost every spending, revenue collecting or aid/grant receiving unit of the Government (the Centre and the States) under his audit domain. His duties are to audit and report upon:

- > All receipts into and spending from the coffers (called the Consolidated Fund) of the Union and State Governments.
- > All transactions relating to the Emergency expenses (called Contingency Funds) and relating to the monies of the public held by the Government e.g. Postal savings, Vikas Patras (called Public Accounts) at Central as well as State levels.
- > All trading, manufacturing, profit and loss accounts, balance sheets and other subsidiary accounts kept in any Government department.
- > All stores and stock accounts of all Government offices and departments.
- > Accounts of all Government companies and Corporations e.g. ONGC, SAIL etc.
- > Accounts of all autonomous bodies and authorities receiving Government money e.g. municipal bodies, IIM's, IIT's, State Health societies.
- > Accounts of any body or authority on request of the President/Governor or on his own initiative.

Audit Reports

- œ CAG submits three audit reports to the President:
 - > Audit report on appropriation accounts.
 - > Audit report on financial accounts.
 - > Audit report on public undertakings.

International Practice

- œ Internationally, most countries have enacted laws putting in certain qualifications and also the process of appointment of the head of their SAI, so that he works independently and is not under the influence of the Executive, whose performance he is required to evaluate and provide audit opinion on achievement of the objectives.
- œ **United Kingdom:** The Exchequer and Audit Act of the United Kingdom, as amended in 1983 provides that the CAG will be jointly selected by the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts and thereafter ratified by the House of Commons.
- œ **United States:** In the USA, under Section 302 of the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921, and the subsequent amendment of the General Accounting Office Act, 1980, the Comptroller General of the United States is appointed by the President on the consent of the Senate.
 - > Further, under an amendment carried out through Section 104 of the General Accounting Office Act of 1980, a commission has to advise the President.
- œ **Canada:** In Canada, the Governor in Council appoints the Auditor General of Canada after

consultation with the leader of every recognised party in the Senate and House of Commons and approval of the appointment by resolution of the Senate and the House of Commons.

- œ **Australia:** The governor general appoints the auditor general only after the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit approve the proposal.
- œ **New Zealand:** The Public Audit Act (2001) of New Zealand provides for the appointment of the CAG by the Governor General on the recommendations of the House of Representatives.
- œ **Japan:** Japan has a Board of Audit with an Audit Commission consisting of three Commissioners and a General Executive Bureau.
 - > A Commissioner is appointed with the consent of the both Houses of the Diet by the Cabinet.
 - > The President of the Board is to be appointed by the Cabinet according to the result of mutual election among the Commissioners.
- œ **Sri Lanka:** The constitution of Sri Lanka provides that the Auditor-General shall be a qualified Auditor and should be appointed by the President subject to the approval of the Constitutional Council.
- œ **Bhutan:** In Bhutan, the Auditor General is to be appointed by the Druk Gyalpo from a list of eminent persons recommended jointly by the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of Bhutan, the Speaker, the Chairperson of the National Council and the Leader of the Opposition Party.
- œ **Africa:** In Africa, Constitution of Malawi provides that no person shall be appointed as Auditor General unless that person has formal relevant qualifications and significant experience in audit work.

UNGA Resolution

- . Internationally, a resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 22, 2011, emphasised that SAIs can perform their tasks objectively and efficiently only if they are independent of the audited entity and are protected against outside influence.
- . It also recognised the important role that SAIs play in promoting efficiency, accountability, effectiveness and transparency of public administration.
- . Thus, appointment of the CAG assumes greater significance.

CONCLUSION:

- œ The CAG has the inescapable constitutional and statutory mandate and responsibility to ensure public accountability, transparency, effective service delivery and good governance.

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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MAJOR REFORMS IN NATURAL GAS MARKETING

- **CONTEXT:** The Government gave nod to major reforms in the marketing of Natural Gas in the country, taking another significant step to move towards gas based economy.
- **ABOUT:**
 - Natural gas is a fossil energy source that formed deep beneath the earth's surface. Natural gas contains many different compounds.
 - œ The largest component of natural gas is methane, a compound with one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms (CH₄).
 - Natural gas also contains smaller amounts of natural gas liquids (NGL, which are also hydrocarbon gas liquids), and nonhydrocarbon gases, such as carbon dioxide and water vapor.
 - Natural gas is used as a fuel and as a feedstock, with demand largely dependent on fertiliser industry (28%), power (23%), city gas distribution entities (16%), refinery (12%) and petrochemicals (8%) industries.
 - India currently produces 84 million standard cubic meters (MMSCM) of natural gas and imports around the same amount.
 - With the new reforms, 40 MMSCM will come into local production. Country's dependency on import of natural gas will reduce.
 - The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas is entrusted with the responsibility of exploration and production of oil and natural gas, their refining, distribution and marketing, import, export and conservation of petroleum products and Liquefied Natural Gas.

Key-highlights of the Policy

- **Standard Procedure:** The objective of the policy is to prescribe standard procedure to discover market price of gas to be sold in the market by gas producers, through a transparent and competitive process, permit Affiliates to participate in bidding process for sale of gas and allow marketing freedom to certain Field Development Plans (FDPs) where Production Sharing Contracts already provide pricing freedom.
- **Transparent Bidding Process:** The policy aims to provide standard procedure for sale of natural gas in a transparent and competitive manner to discover market price by issuing guidelines for sale by contractor through e-bidding.
 - œ This will bring uniformity in the bidding process across the various contractual regimes and policies to avoid ambiguity and contribute towards ease of doing business.
 - œ The policy has also permitted Affiliate companies to participate in the bidding process in view of the open, transparent and electronic bidding.
 - œ This will facilitate and promote more competition in marketing of gas. However, rebidding will have to be done in case only affiliates participate, and there are no other bidders.
- **Freedom to FDPs:** The policy will also grant marketing freedom to the Field Development Plans (FDPs) of those Blocks in which Production Sharing Contracts already provide pricing freedom.

Significance of the Reforms

These reforms will build on a series of transformative reforms rolled out by the Government in last several years. These reforms in gas sector will further deepen and spur the economic activities in the following areas:

- **Transparent system:** The whole eco-system of policies relating to production, infrastructure and marketing of natural gas has been made more transparent with a focus on ease of doing business.



- . **Encouraging investment in domestic production:** These reforms will prove very significant for Atmanirbhar Bharat by encouraging investments in the domestic production of natural gas and reducing import dependence.
- . **Increasing investment in downstream industries:** The domestic production will further help in increasing investment in the downstream industries such as City Gas Distribution and related industries.
 - œ These reforms will prove to be another milestone in moving towards a gas based economy by encouraging investments.
- . **Improvement in environment:** The increased gas production consumption will help in improvement of environment.
- . **Creating employment:** These reforms will also help in creating employment opportunities in the gas consuming sectors including MSMEs.

WORLD'S LONGEST HIGHWAY TUNNEL OPENED IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

◎ **CONTEXT:**

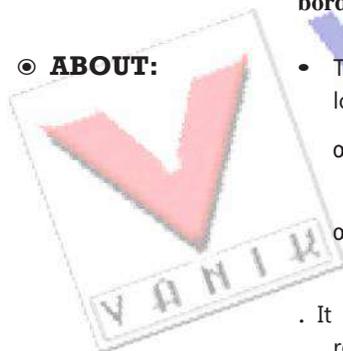
Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Atal Tunnel at Rohtang at an altitude of above 3,000 metres in Himachal Pradesh to provide new strength to the country's border infrastructure.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The 9.02 km-long-tunnel, built by the **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)**, is the world's longest highway tunnel and connects Manali to Lahaul-Spiti valley.
 - œ The **South Portal (SP)** of Atal Tunnel is located at a distance of 25 km from Manali at an altitude of 3,060 metres
 - œ The **North Portal (NP)** of the tunnel is located near village Teling, Sissu, in Lahaul Valley at an altitude of 3,071 Metres.
- . It provides **all-weather connectivity** to the landlocked valley of **Lahaul-Spiti**, which remains cut-off for nearly six months in a year as the **Rohtang Pass** is usually snow-bound between November and April.
- . The tunnel is built with ultra-modern specifications in the **Pir Panjal range** of Himalayas at an altitude of 3000 metres (10,000 feet) from the Mean Sea Level (MSL).
- . The tunnel was constructed using drill and blast NATM (New Austria Tunnelling Method) techniques.

Significance of the development

- . **Round-the-year connectivity:** Before the tunnel construction, the Lahaul Valley used to remain closed for vehicular movement due to bad weather conditions. Now, the people of the Valley will have round-the-year road connectivity.
- . **Reduction in distance:** The tunnel reduces the distance by 46 km between Manali and Leh and the travel time by about 4 to 5 hours.
- . **Better connectivity to the armed forces:** The tunnel, also significant from the military logistics viewpoint, will provide better connectivity to the armed forces in reaching Ladakh.
- . **Boost tourism:** It is expected to boost tourism and winter sports in the region.



STATE CABINET NOD TO MAKE BODO, THE ASSOCIATE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE STATE

- **CONTEXT:** The Assam cabinet has decided to make Bodo the associate official language of the state.
- **ABOUT:**
 - Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state's population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past.
 - . The four districts in Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), are home to several ethnic groups.
 - . The Bodos are considered to be the earliest indigenous inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley having their own kingdom, religion, culture and language.
 - . There are different opinions by historians regarding the origin of Bodos, with many saying that the term 'Bodo' is derived from the Tibetan word 'Bod' — meaning homeland.
 - . According to historians, they belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongoloid race.
 - . Their population is concentrated mostly on the North bank of the Brahmaputra river, in western and parts of Central Assam, the northern part of West Bengal and in some parts of Bhutan and Nepal, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.
 - . The traditional religion of the Bodos is Bathouism — they traditionally worship Bathou-Borai, often identified as the Hindu God Shiva.

About Bodo Language

- . Bodo language, which is one of the 22 scheduled languages of the country.
- . Bodo language, a language of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan languages having several dialects. Bodo is spoken in the northeastern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya and in Bangladesh.
- . It is related to Dimasa, Tripura, and Lalunga languages, and it is written in Latin, Devanagari, and Bengali scripts.

Bodo-Kachari autonomous welfare council

- . The State Cabinet has also created Bodo-Kachari autonomous welfare council outside the **sixth schedule area** for the welfare of the community, particularly for those who living outside the areas of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).
 - œ The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution has provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the border states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
 - œ It has provisions for the constitution of autonomous districts and councils.
- . With this, the Assam government has fulfilled one of the key promises of the Bodoland accord signed with the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) earlier this year.

The Third Accord

- The BTAD was rechristened Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with the signing of the third Bodo accord on 27 January.
- The Centre and Assam government signed the accord with the four factions of the NDFB and the ABSU.
- In this accord, the government has made a provision under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution to appoint a commission that would recommend the 'inclusion and exclusion' of villages under BTR.

BTR Elections

- In another important move for the Bodoland region, the state cabinet decided to request State Election Commission to schedule BTR election in December 2020.
- The term of the sixth schedule erstwhile Bodoland territorial council (BTC) ended on April 27.
- Election to the council were to be held April 4, but had to be indefinitely deferred due to COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns.

CABINET RATIFIES BAN ON '7 HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS' LISTED UNDER 'STOCKHOLM CONVENTION'

◎ CONTEXT:

The Union Cabinet ratified ban on seven Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP's) listed under Stockholm Convention and hazardous to health and environment.

◎ ABOUT:

What are POPs?

- POPs are listed in various Annexes to the Stockholm Convention after thorough scientific research, deliberations and negotiations among member countries.
- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are organic chemical substances, that is, they are carbon-based. They possess a particular combination of physical and chemical properties such that, once released into the environment, they:
 - œ remain intact for exceptionally long periods of time (many years)
 - œ become widely distributed throughout the environment as a result of natural processes involving soil, water and, most notably, air
 - œ accumulate in the fatty tissue of living organisms including humans, and are found at higher concentrations at higher levels in the food chain
 - œ are toxic to both humans and wildlife.
- Exposure to POPs can lead to cancer, damage to central and peripheral nervous systems, diseases of immune system, reproductive disorders and interference with normal infant and child development.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- Considering its commitment towards providing safe environment and addressing human health risks, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had notified the '**Regulation of Persistent Organic Pollutants Rules**', in 2018 under the provisions of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The regulation inter alia prohibited the manufacture, trade, use, import and export seven chemicals which were already listed as POPs under Stockholm Convention, namely-

- œ Chlordecone
- œ Hexabromobiphenyl
- œ Hexabromodiphenyl ether and Heptabromodiphenylether (Commercial octa-BDE)
- œ Tetrabromodiphenyl ether and Pentabromodiphenyl ether (Commercial penta-BDE)
- œ Pentachlorobenzene
- œ Hexabromocyclododecane
- œ Hexachlorobutadiene

What is Stockholm Convention?

- . The Convention was signed in 2001 and effective from May 2004.
- . The Stockholm Convention is a global treaty to protect human health and environment from POPs, which are identified chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate in living organisms, adversely affect human health/ environment and have the property of long-range environmental transport (LRET).
- . India had ratified the Stockholm Convention on January 13, 2006 as per Article 25(4).
 - œ It enabled the country to keep itself in a **default “opt-out” position** such that amendments in various Annexes of the convention cannot be enforced on it unless an instrument of ratification/ acceptance/ approval or accession is explicitly deposited with UN depositary.

INVOLUNTARY NARCO TESTS AN INTRUSION INTO A PERSON’S MENTAL PRIVACY: SUPREME COURT

• **CONTEXT:**

- Involuntary administration of narco or lie detector tests is an “intrusion” into a person’s “mental privacy,” a Supreme Court judgment of 2010 has held.
- . The judgment is significant amid reports that the Uttar Pradesh government wants to subject the Hathras rape and murder victim’s family members to these tests.

• **ABOUT:**

What are polygraph and narcoanalysis tests?

- . **A polygraph test** is based on the assumption that physiological responses that are triggered when a person is lying are different from what they would be otherwise.
 - œ Instruments like cardio-cuffs or sensitive electrodes are attached to the person, and variables such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, change in sweat gland activity, blood flow, etc., are measured as questions are put to them.
 - œ A numerical value is assigned to each response to conclude whether the person is telling the truth, is deceiving, or is uncertain.
- . **Narcoanalysis**, by contrast, involves the injection of a drug, **sodium pentothal**, which induces a hypnotic or sedated state in which the subject’s imagination is neutralised, and they are expected to divulge information that is true.
 - œ The drug, referred to as “**truth serum**” in this context, was used in larger doses as anaesthesia during surgery, and is said to have been used during World War II for intelligence operations.

Are they scientifically successful?

- . However, neither method has been proven scientifically to have a 100% success rate, and remain contentious in the medical field as well.

Supreme Court's views

- . In 2010, a 3- judge bench headed by former CJI KG Balakrishnan ruled,
 - œ The consequences of such tests on **“individuals from weaker sections of society who are unaware of their fundamental rights and unable to afford legal advice”** can be devastating.
 - œ It may involve future abuse, harassment and surveillance, even leakage of the video material to the Press for a “trial by media.”
 - œ Such tests are an affront to human dignity and liberty, and have long-lasting effects.
 - œ An individual’s decision to make a statement is the product of a private choice and there should be no scope for any other individual to interfere with such autonomy.
- . Similarly in September 2017, the Supreme Court passed another ruling which held that “No accused can demand a Narco test to prove their innocence.”

NEW RULES FOR POSTAL BALLOT

◎ CONTEXT:

In order to make the procedure to opt for postal ballot more convenient for those above 80 years of age and people with disabilities, the Election Commission (EC) has come out with a set of new instructions.

◎ ABOUT:

What are the new instructions?

- . The form required to opt for the postal ballot would be delivered by the booth level officer under his polling station, at the residence of-
 - œ all those above 80 years of age
 - œ people with disabilities
- . It would be up to these two category of voters to opt for postal ballot
- . If he/she opts for postal ballot, then the booth level officer will collect the **filled-in form 12-D** from the house of the elector within five days of the notification and deposit it with the returning officer forthwith.

What is postal voting?

- . A restricted set of voters can exercise postal voting.
- . Through this facility, a voter can cast her vote remotely by recording her preference on the ballot paper and sending it back to the election officer before counting.

Who can avail this facility?

- . Members of the armed forces like the **Army, Navy and Air Force, members of the armed police force of a state (serving outside the state), government employees posted outside India** and their spouses are entitled to vote only by post.
- . In other words, they can't vote in person.
- . Special voters such as the President of India, Vice President, Governors, Union Cabinet ministers, Speaker of the House and government officers on poll duty have the option to vote by post. But they have to apply through a prescribed form to avail this facility.
- . Voters under **preventive detention** can also vote only by post.



Absentee Voters

- Recently, the Law Ministry, at the Election Commission’s behest, introduced a new category of ‘absentee voters’, who can now also opt for postal voting.
- These are voters employed in essential services and unable to cast their vote due to their service conditions.
- Currently, officials of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Northern Railway (Passenger and Freight) Services and media persons are notified as absentee voters.

SHAHEEN BAGH CASE: PUBLIC SPACES CANNOT BE OCCUPIED INDEFINITELY, SAYS SC

◎ **CONTEXT:**

Disposing a clutch of petitions in connection with the Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest, the Supreme Court said that public places cannot be occupied ‘indefinitely’ and protests must be allowed only in designated areas.

◎ **BACKGROUND:**

Right to Protest in India

- . The right to protest, to publicly question and force the government to answer, is a fundamental political right of the people that flows directly from a democratic reading of Article 19.
- . The right to peaceful protest is bestowed to Indian citizens by our Constitution.
- . It is part of the freedom of speech and expression, which is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a).
 - œ Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.
 - œ Article 19(1)(b) states about the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
 - œ Article 19(2) imposes reasonable restrictions on the right to assemble peaceably and without arms and to freedom of speech and expression and none of these rights are absolute in nature.
 - > These reasonable restrictions are imposed in the interests of the sovereignty & integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- . On September 21, the bench reserved its verdict after observing that the right to protest has to be balanced with the right of the people to use a public road.

Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest

- . On March 23, the Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest against the citizenship law was cleared by Delhi police after curbs were imposed on assembly and movement of people in wake of the coronavirus pandemic.
- . The protest had been on for more than 100 days. It began on December 15 in Southeast Delhi, with at least 300 women at the forefront of it.
- . It sparked many similar demonstrations across the country.
- . The protest saw several elderly women, some in their 80s, participate daily.



Legal Provisions

- The legal provisions and avenue available to police for handling agitations, protests, and unlawful assemblies are covered by-
 - œ the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973
 - œ the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860
 - œ the Police Act, 1861

What has the apex court observed?

- The apex court observed **it is the duty of the administration to remove such road blockades**. Unfortunately no action by administration and hence court's intervention in the matter.
- A bench comprising Justices SK Kaul, Krishna Murari and Hrishikesh Roy said:
"Public places cannot be occupied indefinitely. Dissent and democracy go hand in hand but protests must be carried out in designated area... Such kind of occupation of public place for protests is not acceptable."

CHINA PITCHES FOR CLOSER TIES WITH BANGLADESH

◎ CONTEXT:

Xi Jinping's recent call for China and Bangladesh to jointly promote the multi-billion Belt and Road Initiative has only served to heighten India's concerns about the initiative.

◎ ABOUT:

What is BRI?

- The BRI seeks to build rail, maritime and road links from Asia to Europe and Africa in a revival of ancient Silk Road trading routes.
- It is among Xi Jinping's top priority initiatives and aims firm up China's global influence.
- Besides Pakistan, where China initiated over USD 60 billion as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China has stepped up its huge infrastructure investments in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, sparking rising concerns about its growing influence in India's immediate neighbourhood.

Why India should be worried?

- With India's ties with its neighbours — even including Nepal — having been strained in the recent past, the prospect of Dhaka drawing closer to China is a worrying one.
- Bangladesh became a part of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2016 and has seen its ties with Beijing grow exponentially in recent years.
- These are developments that India would be tracking closely for their ramifications in the neighbourhood.

Assessing the strategies

- Although Bangladesh has broadly had warm relations with India, New Delhi has good reason to view the involvement of Dhaka in the BRI with concern.
- As of now, none of the projects that China is executing in Bangladesh have strategic implications.
- However, India would need to closely track present as well as future projects under the BRI in Bangladesh in order to secure its strategic interests.
- Delay in bilateral negotiations between India and Bangladesh also presents the danger of alienating the latter country.

- . Among the issues which have seen such a delay is the water-sharing deal on the Teesta river. The Bangladesh government is now considering a proposal from China on the management and restoration of the Teesta river.
- . The Quad — which consists of India, Japan, Australia and the US — also presents an opportunity to counter China’s rising influence through BRI.
- . As China forges closer ties with Bangladesh through the BRI, India needs to work both on maintaining good ties with Dhaka and also countering the influence of the initiative through strategic alliances.

India’s concerns on BRI

- . The BRI has been a major bone of contention between India and China as one portion of the corridor passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- . India has consistently been critical of the BRI and has refused to join it. In 2018, India was the only country in the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation grouping which opposed the initiative.

Which countries are not in favour of the project?

- . The initiative has, however, attracted allegations, especially from the US, of debt-diplomacy after Sri Lanka handed over its Hambantota Port to a state-run Chinese firm in 2017 for a 99 years' lease in a debt swap amounting to \$1.2 billion.
- . Malaysia has also deferred several projects under the BRI, citing cost revaluation.

INDIA TEST-FIRES NEW VERSION OF NUCLEAR CAPABLE SHAURYA MISSILE

◎ **CONTEXT:**

India successfully test-fired indigenously developed hypersonic nuclear-capable Shaurya missile, an advanced version of Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) K-15 (B-05).

◎ **ABOUT:**

- ‘Shaurya’, which is the land variant of India’s K-15 missile, has a strike range of 700 km to 1000 km and is capable of carrying payloads of 200 kg t 1000 kg.
- The missile can be stored in a composite canister.
- The missile is less vulnerable to anti-ballistic missile defence systems due to its high manoeuvrability.
- The surface-to-surface tactical missile is 10 metres long, 74 cm in diameter and weighs 6.2 tonnes.
- Its two stages use solid propellants.
- **Launching platform:** The missile can be launched from silos and canisters mounted on a truck and fixed on the ground, they said adding that it can be easily moved around. A truck itself can become a launching platform.

The K Family of missiles

- . The K family of missiles are primarily **Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs)**, which have been indigenously developed by DRDO and are named after **Dr Kalam**.

- . The development of these naval platform launched missiles began in the late 1990s as a step towards completing **India's nuclear triad** — the capability of launching nuclear weapons from land, sea and air based assets.
- . Because these missiles are to be launched from submarines, they are lighter, smaller and stealthier than their land-based counterparts, the Agni series of missiles which are medium and intercontinental range nuclear capable ballistic missiles.
- . While K family are primarily submarine-fired missiles to be fired from India's Arihant class nuclear powered platforms, the land and air variants of some of its members have also been developed by the DRDO.

India towards self-reliance

- . Recently, India also successfully testfired the **BrahMos supersonic cruise missile** which can hit targets at over 400 km strike range which is at least more than 100 kms from the previous capability of the missile.
- . The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has been working towards completing total self-reliance in the field of strategic missiles and has enhanced its efforts further under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this year.

Significance

- . The new version of the missile will be inducted in the strategic forces to complement one of the existing missiles in the same class. The missile would be lighter and easier to operate in comparison with the existing missile.
- . The successful flight-test of Shaurya missile extended range version of surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missile BrahMos is seen by defence experts as major steps in enhancing the country's indigenous contents.
- . The development of these capabilities is important in light of India's relations with the two neighbours China and Pakistan.

SUPERSONIC MISSILE ASSISTED RELEASE OF TORPEDO (SMART) SYSTEM

◎ **CONTEXT:**

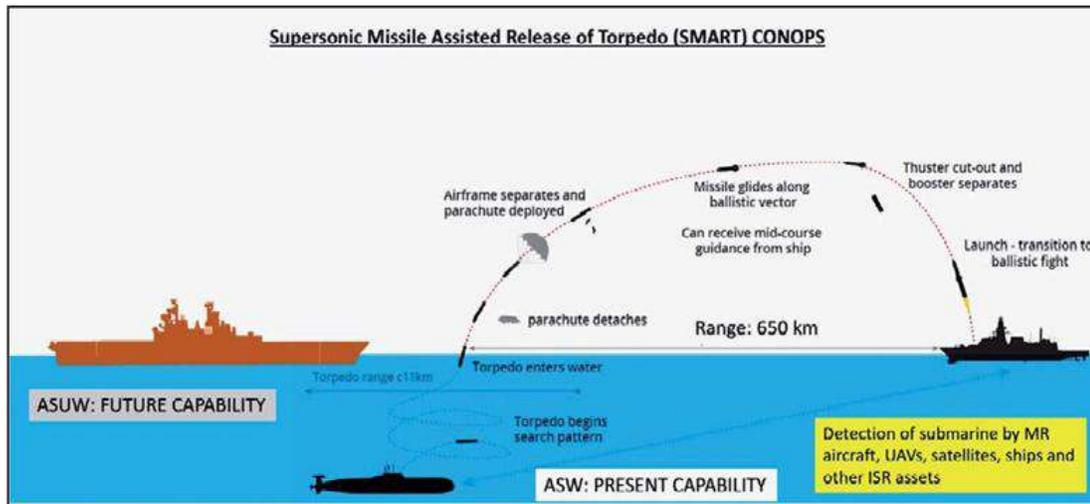
- A successful flight test of the Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) system was conducted from Wheeler Island, off the coast of Odisha.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- SMART is a missile-assisted release of lightweight anti-submarine torpedo system for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations far beyond torpedo range.
- . SMART is a hybrid missile that incorporates technologies of two different weapon systems making it faster and stealthier.
- . With this, India has got an anti-submarine weapon having much higher range.
- . While the long range torpedo available in the world is around 50 km and rocket-assisted torpedoes can strike at a range of 150 km, the SMART will have a range of over 600 km.

Significance of the System

- . The development of the system has been crucial in capacity building of naval platforms to strike beyond the torpedo range.



- The system will be a significant addition to India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities and the test is a key step towards its deployment.
- This launch and demonstration is significant in establishing anti-submarine warfare capabilities.



CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST
WEEK- 3 (OCTOBER, 2020)

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BHARATMALA PARIYOJANA

CONTEXT

A total of 322 projects in a length of 12,413 Km have been awarded under Bharatmala Pariyojana till August, 2020. Further, 2921 Km has been constructed under the Project till the same date.

ABOUT:

- œ Bharatmala Pariyojana is an umbrella program for the highways sector that focuses on optimizing efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions.
- œ The launch of the scheme has been done for bring a new wave of development in the nation in the form of well-maintained and developed roads. Under this project, the construction of roads, in all parts of the nation will be undertaken.

Present Status

- œ A total of 322 projects in a length of 12,413 Km have been awarded under Bharatmala Pariyojana till August, 2020. Further, 2921 Km has been constructed under the Project.
- œ The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has taken up detailed review of NHs network and has given overall investment approval for Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase I Scheme for development of about 34,800 km (including 10,000 Km residual NHDP stretches) at an estimated outlay of Rs 5,35,000 Crore.

Features of the Scheme

- œ **Total road construction** - As per the draft of the scheme, government and the ministry will strive to complete new roads, which will add up to a whopping 34, 800 kms.
- œ **Integrated scheme** - The Bharatmala is the name that is given to the road development and it will include many other related schemes as well. With the completion of all the schemes, the overall success of the scheme will be guaranteed.
- œ **Total tenure of the program** -The central government has the plans of finishing the scheme within a span of five years. Thus, all is set for finishing the first phase before the end of 2022.
- œ **Segmentation in phases** - Due to the sheer magnitude and spread of the scheme, it will be divided into seven distinct phases. As of now, the first phase is under construction.
- œ **Constriction on a daily basis** - To finish the first phase in time, the respective department has made efforts of constructing at least 18 km of path on a daily basis. To beat the clock, continued efforts are being made to raise it to 30 km/day.

- œ **Different categories of road construction** - It has been highlighted in the official draft of the scheme that to provide better connectivity, the construction of various categories of roads will be undertaken.
- œ **Multi-source of finding** - One source will not be enough for funding a mammoth project. Thus, the government will have to depend on other sources for generating adequate money to meet the expenses.
- œ A total of around 24,800 kms are being considered in Phase I of Bharatmala. In addition, Bharatmala Pariyojana phase -I also includes 10,000 kms of balance road works under NHDP, taking the total to 34,800 kms at an estimated cost of Rs.5,35,000 crore. Bharatmala Phase I - is to be implemented over a five years period of i.e. 2017-18 to 2021-22.

Bharatmala project category

- œ **Economic Corridor** - As per the guidelines of the road construction project, the construction of 9000kms of Economic Corridors will be undertaken by the central government.
- œ **Feeder Route or Inter Corridor** - The total length of the roads, which fall under the Feeder Route or Inter Corridor category, is a whopping 6000kms.
- œ **National Corridor Efficiency Improvement** - 5000kms of roads, constructed under the scheme will fall in the category of National Corridor for the better connection between roads.
- œ **Border Road and International Connectivity** - Connecting the cities and remote areas, which are situated in the border regions, the project has kept provision for constructing 2000kms roads that fall in the Border Road or International Connectivity category.
- œ **Port Connectivity and Coastal Road** - To connect the areas that are dotted along the shorelines and important ports, the central government has ordered the construction of 2000km of roads.
- œ **Green Field Expressway** - The main stress will be given on the construction and development of Green Field Expressway for better management of traffic and freight.
- œ **Balance NHDP Works** - Under the last segment, the project will see a construction and maintenance of about 10,000kms of new roads.

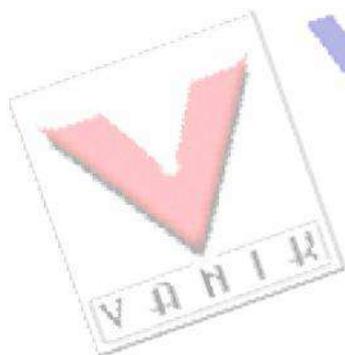
Significance of the project

- œ Bharatmala Pariyojana will enhance the efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions.
- œ It will bring Improvement in efficiency of existing corridors through development of Multimodal Logistics Parks and elimination of choke point.
- œ It will enhance focus on improving connectivity in North East and leveraging synergies with Inland Waterways.
- œ It emphasis on use of technology & scientific

planning for Project Preparation and Asset Monitoring.

● CONCLUSION:

- œ For connecting the areas and maintaining smooth flow of traffic, the construction of new and developed roads are a must. The same will be achieved with the implementation of the Bharatmala project. Under the scheme, a host of new roads will be laid down in the nation which would further help in development by enhancing the infrastructure efficiency.



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THE HUMAN COST OF DISASTERS 2000-2019- UNDRR

CONTEXT

In a recent report “The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019”, the United Nations pointed out that climate change is largely to blame for a near doubling of natural disasters in the past 20 years.

● ABOUT:

- œ The report was published to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- œ International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is observed on October 13, every year.
- œ It confirms extreme weather events have come to dominate the disaster landscape in the 21st century.
- œ The report did not touch on biological hazards and disease-related disasters like the coronavirus pandemic

About UNDRR

- . The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction was established in 1999 and serves as the focal point in the United Nations System for the coordination of disaster risk reduction.
- . It supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which maps out a broad people-centered approach towards achieving a substantial reduction in disaster losses from natural and man-made hazards and a shift in emphasis from disaster management to disaster risk management.

Key Findings

- œ In the period 2000 to 2019, there were 7,348 major recorded disaster events claiming 1.23 million lives, affecting 4.2 billion people (many on more than one occasion) resulting in approximately US\$2.97 trillion in global economic losses.
- œ The last twenty years has seen the number of major floods more than double, from 1,389 to 3,254, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034. Floods and storms were the most prevalent events.
- œ The sharp increase was largely attributable to a rise in climate-related disasters, including extreme weather events like floods, drought and storms.
- œ It also recorded major increases in other categories including drought, wildfires and extreme temperature events.
- œ Asia has suffered the highest number of disasters in the past 20 years with 3,068 such events, followed by the Americas with 1,756 and Africa with 1,192.
- œ In terms of affected countries, China topped the

list with 577 events followed by the United States with 467.

- œ A warming climate appeared to be driving the number and severity of such disasters
- œ There has also been a rise in geo-physical events including earthquakes and tsunamis which have killed more people than any of the other natural hazards
- œ The deadliest single disaster in the past 20 years was the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, with 226,400 deaths, followed by the Haiti earthquake in 2010, which claimed some 222,000 lives.

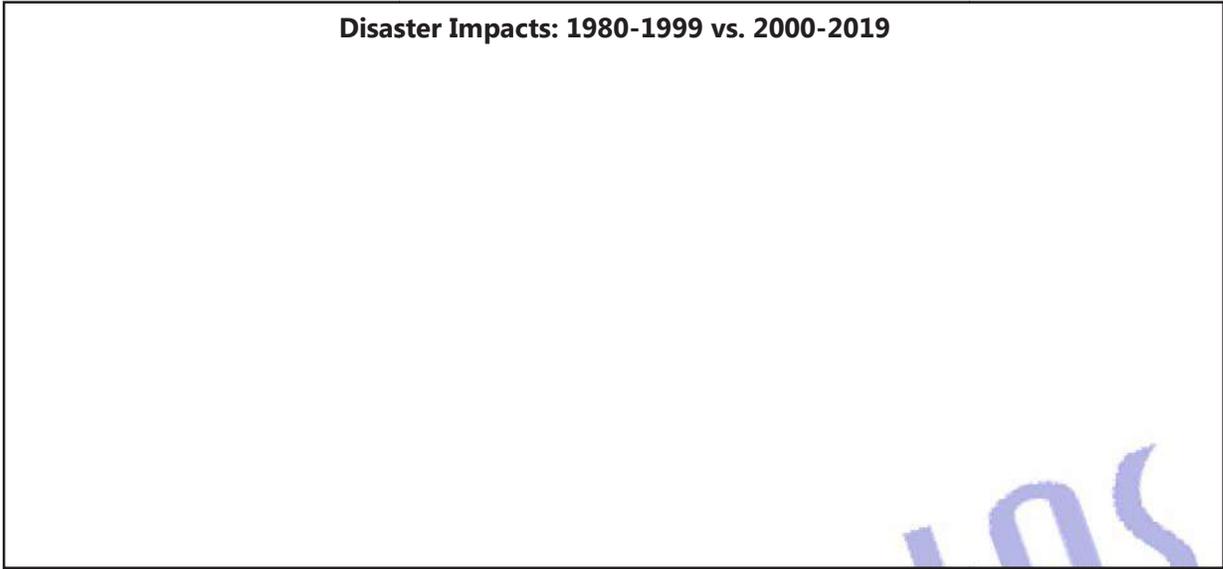
Major Concerns:

- œ A temperature increase of 3°C of the global climate is estimated to increase the frequency of potentially high impact natural hazard events across the world. This could render current national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation obsolete in many countries.
- œ Shifting rainfall patterns and greater variability in precipitation poses a risk to the 70% of global agriculture that is rain-fed and the 1.3 billion people dependent on degrading agricultural land.

Recommendations:

- œ The concentrated impact due to a single disaster type in some countries provides an opportunity for a more focused approach on disaster risk reduction.
- œ COVID-19 demonstrates the need for a systemic, multi hazard approach in an increasingly globalized and inter-connected world;
- œ There is a requirement for strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk with clear vision, competence, plans, guidelines, funding and coordination across sectors and in a manner which takes account of the increasingly systemic nature of disaster risk.
- œ Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures needs to be stepped up to create disaster resilient societies.

Disaster Impacts: 1980-1999 vs. 2000-2019





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AQUAPONICS

CONTEXT

Recently, a pilot ‘Aquaponics facility’ has been developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Mohali at Guru AngadDev Veterinary University (GADVASU), Ludhiana.

About Pilot Aquaponics Facility -

- œ Aquaponics is state-of-the-art facility. It is the first of its kind in region. This facility is equipped with advanced sensors for monitoring and automated controls.
- œ It has been developed with the funding support from Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt. of India.
- œ This facility is nearly 100% organic, need much less land for a give yield of crop, consumes 90% less water, the fish and plants so grown are more nutritious.

What is Aquaponics

- œ Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics in which both fishes as well as the plants are grown in an integrated manner.
- œ Aquaculture is growing fish and other aquatic animals, and hydroponics is growing plants without soil.
- œ Aquaponics uses these two in a symbiotic combination in which aquatic animals' discharge or waste provides fertilizer for growing plants.
- œ The plants absorb nutrients and filter the water. This filtered water is used to replenish the fish tank.
- œ It is an environment friendly technique. It is a perfect collaboration between aquaculture and gardening.

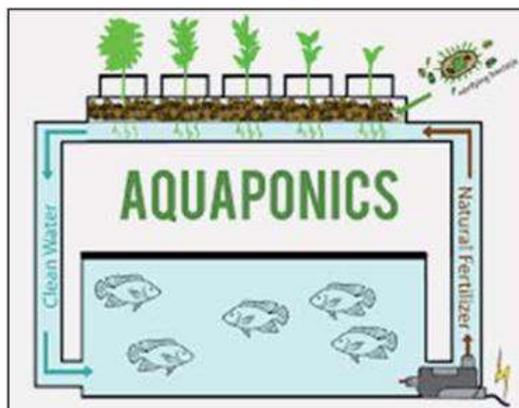
Benefits of Aquaponics:

- œ There is no need to use fertilizers because the fish provide rich nutrients for the plants.
- œ It is water efficient process as less water is used for the crops. It uses 1/10th of the water you would use for soil garden.
- œ Pesticides or other chemicals are not used because they would harm the fish. This results in healthier and organic vegetables.
- œ There will not be any soil borne diseases in aquaponics because soil is not required in aquaponics

- œ Plants can grow in very small space, and have a great harvest.
- œ Plants grow fast because they get very nutritious substances from the fish waste.
- œ Water is used in a closed system and circulated effectively, reducing the consumption and the water bills.

Disadvantages of Aquaponics

- œ A lot of crops cannot be grown through aquaponics. For example, specific plant species such as tuberous plants and root vegetables perform most of their growth within soil and aquaponics uses water as a substitute for soil.
- œ High Electricity Consumption-Fish tanks are supposed to be kept at certain temperatures 24 hours a day. Water pumps also run 24 hours a day and this leads to high electricity consumption.
- œ It is a complex system that requires a lot of knowledge and experience to construct and maintain. If it is not constructed flawlessly, losses of fish and crop/plants occur which can waste your time and money.



MARS OPPOSITION

CONTEXT

An event referred to as “opposition”, which takes place every two years and two months, Mars will outshine Jupiter, becoming the third brightest object in the night sky during the month of October.

● BACKGROUND:

- œ The opposition took place, on October 13, which gave the planet its “biggest, apparent size of the 2020s.
- œ An opposition can occur anywhere along Mars’ orbit, but when it happens when the planet is closest to the sun, it is also particularly close to the Earth.
- œ Opposition is the best time to view Mars.

● ANALYSIS:

When does Mars Oppositions take place?

- œ Mars oppositions happen about every 26 months. Every 15 or 17 years, opposition occurs within a few weeks of Mars’ perihelion (the point in its orbit when it is closest to the sun). This year, Mars opposition occurs on Oct. 13, 2020.
- œ Mars’s next close approach will happen on December 8, 2022, when the planet will be 62.07 km away from the Earth. Even so, the closest approach does not mean that Mars will appear to be the same size as that of the moon.

What is opposition?

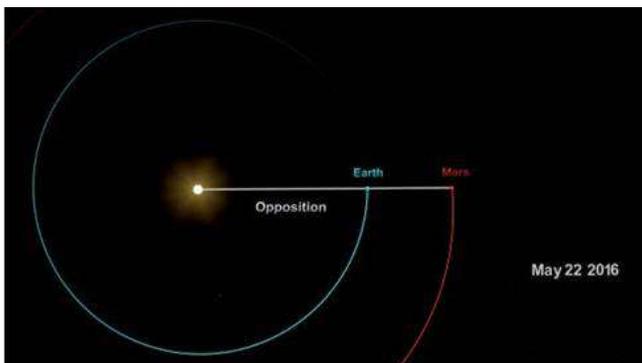
- œ Opposition is the event when the sun, Earth and an outer planet are lined up, with the Earth in the middle.
- œ The time of opposition is the point when the outer planet is typically at its closest distance to the Earth for a given year, and the planet appears brighter in the sky.
- œ An opposition can occur anywhere along Mars’ orbit, but when it happens when the planet is also closest to the sun, it is also particularly close to the Earth.
- œ Like all the planets in our solar system, Earth and Mars orbit the sun. But Earth is closer to the sun, and therefore races along its orbit more quickly.
- œ Earth makes two trips around the sun in about the same amount of time that Mars takes to make one trip. So sometimes the two planets are on opposite sides of the sun, very far apart, and other times, Earth catches up with its neighbor and passes relatively close to it.

Why it is called as opposition?

- œ Because from the perspective on Earth, the sun and Mars appear to be on the opposite sides of the sky, Mars is said to be in “opposition”. Essentially, opposition is a reference to “opposing the sun” in the sky.

Conditions for its occurrence

- œ The Earth and Mars orbit the sun, there comes a point when they are on the opposite sides of it, and hence very far apart. At its farthest, Mars is about 400 million km from the Earth.
- œ In case of opposition, however, Mars and sun are on directly opposite sides of the Earth. In other words, the Earth, sun and Mars all lie in a straight line, with the Earth in the middle.
- œ According to NASA, from an individual’s perspective on the Earth, Mars rises in the east and after staying up all night, it sets in the west just as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.



RATIFICATION OF 7 PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet has approved the Ratification of seven (7) chemicals listed under Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

◎ BACKGROUND:

- œ The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had notified the 'Regulation of Persistent Organic Pollutants Rules, on March 5, 2018 under the provisions of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, for providing safe environment and addressing human health risks.
- œ The regulation prohibits the manufacture, trade, use, import and export seven chemicals namely
 - > Chlordecone
 - > Hexabromobiphenyl
 - > Hexabromodiphenyl ether and Heptabromodiphenylether (Commercial octa-BDE)
 - > Tetrabromodiphenyl ether and Pentabromodiphenyl ether (Commercial penta-BDE)
 - > Pentachlorobenzene
 - > Hexabromocyclododecane
 - > Hexachlorobutadiene

Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

- œ POPs are identified chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate in living organisms, adversely affect human health/ environment and have the property of long-range environmental transport (LRET).
- œ POPs bio-magnify throughout the food chain and bio-accumulate in organisms. The highest concentrations of POPs are thus found in organisms at the top of the food chain.
- œ Exposure to POPs can lead to cancer, damage to central & peripheral nervous systems, diseases of immune system, reproductive disorders and interference with normal infant and child development.
- œ POPs are listed in various Annexes to the Stockholm Convention after thorough scientific research, deliberations and negotiations among member countries.

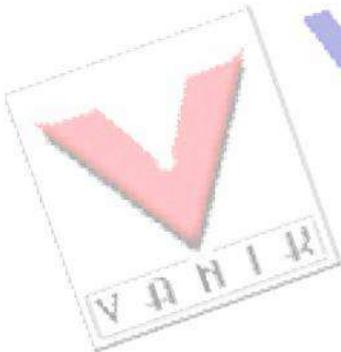
Stockholm Convention

- œ The Stockholm Convention was adopted in 2001 and entered into force in 2004.
- œ The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods.
- œ The objective of the Stockholm Convention is to protect human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants.
- œ India had ratified the Stockholm Convention on January 13, 2006.
- œ Initially, twelve POPs have been recognized as causing adverse effects on humans and the ecosystem and these can be placed in 3 categories:
 - > **Pesticides:** aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex, toxaphene
 - > **Industrial chemicals:** hexachlorobenzene, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)
 - > **By-products:** hexachlorobenzene; polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans (PCDD/PCDF), and PCBs.
- œ The POPs list has been further amended to include some new POPs under the Stockholm Convention.

Significance for India

- œ The Cabinet's approval for ratification of POPs demonstrates India's commitment to meet its international obligations with regard to protection of environment and human health.
- œ It indicates the resolve of the Government to take action on POPs by implementing control measures, develop and implement action plans for unintentionally produced chemicals, develop inventories of the chemicals' stockpiles and review as well as update its National Implementation Plan (NIP).
- œ The ratification process would enable India to access Global Environment Facility (GEF) financial resources in updating the NIP.

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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DELHI, MALE INK \$400-MN PACT FOR CONNECTIVITY

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Following up on India's announcement of a \$500 million package to the Maldives, the Exim Bank of India and the Maldives's Ministry of Finance signed an agreement for \$400 million in Male.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - Line of Credit is basically an agreement between a borrower and the lender whether it is a bank or a NBFC.
 - According to this agreement the lender is ready to lend a maximum amount to the borrower.
 - The borrower can withdraw money any time he or she want until they reach the maximum limit.
 - The Line of Credit is **not a 'grant' but a 'soft loan'**.
 - It is provided on **concessional interest rates** to developing countries, which has to be repaid by the borrowing government.
 - It also helps to promote exports of Indian goods and services, as 75% of the value of the contract must be sourced from India.

The Agreement

- The **line of credit (LoC)** will fund the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**, a key pledge of President Ibrahim Solih.
- India has also pledged a grant of \$ 100 million for the initiative.

Greater Male Connectivity Project

- Maldivians have often highlighted the disparity between capital Male and the atolls that can be reached only via boat service.
- The GMCP, a 6.7 km bridge and causeway network connecting Male, with islands Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi, is the second significant connectivity project in the Indian Ocean archipelago, coming two years after the China backed \$200 million Sinamale Bridge, or the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge connecting airport island of Hulhule with the capital, was inaugurated.
- The Greater Male Connectivity Project will lead to greater possibilities. It is the gateway to a more developed and economically-resilient nation.

GST COUNCIL CAN'T ARRIVE AT A CONSENSUS ON COMPENSATION ISSUE

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Even after continuous meetings, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council in its recent meeting failed to reach a consensus on borrowing options in lieu of the compensation cess shortfall.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**

What is the compensation issue?

 - The Indian economy was in a slowdown even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit India. This was reflected in the weak economic indicators and a slowing GST collection.
 - In October, payments to states were delayed as the collection was lower than expected.

- Under GST law, states were guaranteed to receive payment for any loss of revenue in the first five years of the GST implementation, from July 1, 2017.
- States have been promised compensation for any revenue shortfall till 2022, in case they go below the 14 percent annual growth since the GST rollout in 2017.

Looming Showdown

OPTION 1 OPERATIONAL

States can approach Centre to facilitate borrowing

Borrowings under ₹1.1 lakh cr option

Loans to be serviced from compensation cess

Cess extended beyond five years

DISSENTING STATES

No clarity on way ahead

States say all decisions need to be taken in GST Council

Kerala, Punjab could approach SC

CENTRE SAYS

States in better position to borrow

There will be trouble in bond markets if it borrows more



Nirmala Sitharaman
Finance minister

- The amount due to states started rising at a compounded rate of 14 percent, despite compensation collections not showing any major upward movement for two consecutive years.
- For the April-June period, Rs 14,675 crore has been collected as compensation cess, of which Rs 7,665 crore was collected in June.
- The Centre cleared Rs 36,400 crore for the November-February period in June.
- In July, the Centre released Rs 1.65 lakh crores as GST compensation to states/Union Territories for the financial year 2019-20, against cess collection of Rs 95,444 crores.

Goods & Services Tax

- Goods & Services Tax Council is a **constitutional body** for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to **Goods and Service Tax**.
- As per **Article 279A (1)** of the amended Constitution, the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of Article 279A.
- As per Article 279A of the amended Constitution, the GST Council which will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States, shall consist of the following members:
 -
 - > **Chairperson:** the Union Finance Minister- Chairperson
 - > **Member:** the Union Minister of State in charge of Revenue or Finance-Member
 - > **Members:** the Minister in charge of Finance or Taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State Government

Why is it important?

- With States depending heavily on funds from the Centre to meet their public expenditure, any impediments in the flow of funds from Centre will impact the quality of services provided by State government.

- . If the GST Council decides to increase the rates of compensation cess or stretch the period for which States are compensated, this may mean that goods taxed at the highest GST rate of 28 per cent will continue to pinch people's pocket.
- . Select vehicles, tobacco and aerated drinks, apart from coal, are levied a compensation cess.

NITI AAYOG ANNOUNCES GOVERNING STRUCTURE OF INDIA ENERGY MODELLING FORUM

● **CONTEXT:**

- **NITI Aayog has announced the governing structure of the India Energy Modelling Forum (IEMF) following its constitution in July.**

● **ABOUT:**

- The IEM Forum was jointly launched by NITI Aayog and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the US–India Strategic Energy Partnership.
- Part of the Sustainable Growth pillar of the US–India Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP), IEMF aims to engage Indian researchers, knowledge partners, think tanks and national and international government agencies and departments for modelling and long-term energy planning.

What are Energy Modelling Forums (EMF)?

- . Energy modeling or energy system modeling is the process of building computer models of energy systems in order to analyze them.
- . The Energy Modelling Forum (EMF) in USA was established in 1976 at Stanford University to connect leading modelling experts and decision makers from government, industry, universities, and other research organizations.
- . The forum provides an unbiased platform to discuss the contemporary issues revolving around energy and environment.

Governing structure of the Forum

- . The governing structure of IEMF will consist of an inter-ministerial and a steering committee.
- . The inter-ministerial committee will be convened by NITI Aayog and headed by its CEO, and comprise senior officials from the ministries of petroleum and natural gas; power; new and renewable energy; coal; environment, forest and climate change; and department of science and technology. This committee will review the studies/modelling activities and provide directions and new areas of research.
- . The steering committee will comprise representatives of the:
 - œ Government (ministries of environment, forest and climate change; new and renewable energy; statistics and programme implementation; Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council; Coal Controller's Organization; Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell; Central Electricity Authority; and NITI Aayog)
 - œ Industry Associations (FICCI and CII)
 - œ Academia (IIT Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Delhi)

India and US's collaboration on Energy

- . India and the US have a long-standing collaboration on energy.
- . The Sustainable Growth pillar, one of the four of the US–India SEP, is being chaired by NITI Aayog and USAID.

- . This pillar brings together Indian and US researchers and decision-makers to collaborate in three focal areas:
 - œ energy data management
 - œ energy modelling
 - œ promotion of low carbon technologies
- . IEMF was launched under the area of energy modelling.
- . Through collaborations with global energy modelling forums, such as Stanford Energy Modelling Forum and Energy Modelling Platform for Europe, IEMF hopes to share and learn from best practices.

THE PRIZE IN ECONOMIC SCIENCE 2020

- © **CONTEXT:**
 - **The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2020 was awarded jointly to Paul R. Milgrom and Robert B. Wilson “for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats.”**

- © **ABOUT:**
 - The prize for economics is officially known as the **Sveriges Riksbank Prize** in Economic Sciences.
 - It was established by **Sweden’s central bank** and has been awarded since 1969 in memory of industrialist **Alfred Nobel**.

What is auction theory?

- . Essentially, it is about how auctions lead to the discovery of the price of a commodity. Auction theory studies-
 - œ how auctions are designed
 - œ what rules govern them
 - œ how bidders behave
 - œ what outcomes are achieved
- . Over time, more and more goods and services have been brought under auction.
- . The nature of these commodities differs sharply. For instance-
 - œ A bankrupt person’s property is starkly different from the spectrum for radio or telecom use.
 - œ Similarly, carbon dioxide emission credits are quite different from the spot market for buying electricity, which, in turn, is quite different from choosing which company should get the right to collect the local garbage.
- . In other words, no one auction design fits all types of commodities or seller.
- . This is also true because the purpose of an auction also differs with the commodity and the entity conducting the auction. More often than not, private sellers want to maximise their gains while public authorities may have other goals in mind.

What are the key variables that determine the outcome of an auction?

Three key variables need to be understood while designing an auction.

- **Rules of auction:** The bidding behaviour is likely to differ if the rules stipulate open bids as against closed/sealed bids. The same applies to single bids versus multiple bids, or whether bids are made one after another or everyone bids at the same time.
- **Commodity/ service put up for auction:** The second variable is the commodity or service being put up for auction. In essence, the question is how does each bidder value an item. This is not always easy to ascertain. In terms of telecom spectrum, it might be



easier to peg the right value for each bidder because most bidders are likely to put the spectrum to the same use. This is called the “common” value of an object.

œ But this may not be the case with some other commodities, say a painting.

œ Person A may derive considerably more “private” or personal value — just by looking at it endlessly — than person B.

œ In most auctions, bidders allocate both “common” as well as “private” values to the object being auctioned and this affects their eventual bids.

- . **Uncertainty:** The third variable is uncertainty. For instance, which bidder has what information about the object, or even the value another bidder associates with the object.

EIGHT BEACHES AWARDED THE BLUE FLAG CERTIFICATION

© **CONTEXT:**

- . Eight beaches in India have been awarded the coveted ‘Blue Flag’ certification by an eminent international jury, which comprises members of the-
 - œ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
 - œ United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
 - œ Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)
 - œ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

© **ABOUT:**

What is the ‘Blue Flag’ certification?

- . The ‘Blue Flag’ is a certification that can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator, and serves as an eco-label.
- . The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education, which sets stringent environmental, educational, safety-related and access-related criteria that applicants must meet and maintain.
- . It is awarded annually to beaches and marinas in FEE member countries.

Criteria for certification

- . Blue Flag certification is granted based on 33 criteria under four heads –
 - œ environmental education and information
 - œ bathing water quality
 - œ environment management and conservation
 - œ safety and services at the beaches

Which beaches are selected for certification?

- . The beaches selected for the certification are:
 - œ Kappad (Kerala)
 - œ Shivrajpur (Gujarat)
 - œ Ghoghla (Diu)
 - œ Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka)
 - œ Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh)
 - œ Golden (Odisha)
 - œ Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands)



Item for Box

- . India is the only country that has received the Blue Flag certification in 2 years' time.
- . Japan, South Korea and UAE are the only other Asian nations that have been conferred with a couple of Blue Flag beaches in a time frame of about 5 to 6 years.
- . With the feat, India is now in the league of 50 'Blue Flag' countries.
- . Spain tops the list with more than 560 such beaches; Greece and France follow.

- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
- The Blue Flag programme was started in France in 1985 and in areas out of Europe in 2001.
 - Forty-seven countries currently participate in the program, and 4,573 beaches, marinas, and boats have this certification.
 - In its July 2019 notification, the Environment Ministry identified the following beaches in India for Blue Flag certification: Shivrajpur (Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat), Bhogave (Sindhudurg, Maharashtra), Ghoghla (Diu, Daman and Diu), Miramar (Panjim, Goa), Kasarkod (Karwar, Karnataka), Padubidri (Udupi, Karnataka), Kappad (Kozhikode, Kerala), Eden (Puducherry), Mahabalipuram (Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu), Rushikonda (Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Puri, Odisha), and Radhanagar (Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar).

What activities are permitted in the CRZ of certain beaches?

- . According to the notification issued in January, the following activities and facilities would be permitted in the CRZ of the beaches, including islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the **High Tide Line (HTL)**:
 - œ Portable toilet blocks, change rooms and shower panels;
 - œ Grey water treatment plant;
 - œ Solid waste management plant;
 - œ Solar power plant;
 - œ Purified drinking water facility;
 - œ Beach access pathways;
 - œ Landscaping lighting;
 - œ Seating benches and sit-out umbrellas;
 - œ Outdoor play / fitness equipment;
 - œ CCTV surveillance and control room;
 - œ First aid station;
 - œ Cloak room facility;
 - œ Safety watch towers and beach safety equipment;
 - œ Beach layout, environment information boards and other signages;
 - œ Fencing, preferably vegetative;
 - œ Parking facilities;
 - œ Entry gate, tourist facilitation centre; and
 - œ Other associated facilities or infrastructure, as per requirements of Blue Flag Certification.



KAMDHENU DEEPAWALI ABHIYAN

- **CONTEXT:**
 - Encouraged by the response to Gaumaya Ganesha Campaign which encouraged usage of eco-friendly material in manufacture of idols for the Ganesha Festival, Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA) has started a nation-wide campaign to celebrate “Kamdheni Deepawali Abhiyan” this year on the occasion of Deepawali festival.
- **BACKGROUND:**
 - Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA) has been constituted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for the conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny and for giving direction to the cattle development programmes.
 - RKA is high powered permanent body to formulate policy and to provide direction to the implementation of schemes related to cattle so as to give more emphasis on livelihood generation.

India’s livestock sector

- Livestock economy sustains nearly 73 million households in rural areas.
- Even though, the country is largest producer of milk, the average milk yield in India is only 50% of the world average.
- The low productivity is largely due to deterioration in genetic stock, poor nutrition and unscientific management.
- The trend needs to be reversed and popular perception about cow and cow based agriculture and cow based industry need to be corrected immediately for social and economic rejuvenation of society particularly poor in rural areas.

Significance of the initiative

- RKA aims reaching 11 crore families to ignite 33 crore Diyas made of cow-dung during this year’s Deepawali festival.
- Apart from generating business opportunities to thousands of cow-based entrepreneurs / farmers/ women entrepreneurs, the use of cow-dung products will lead to cleaner and healthier environment.
- It will help in making Gaushalas ‘Atma Nirbhar’ too.
- By providing an environment friendly alternative to Chinese made Diyas, the campaign will boost up Make in India vision and also promote ‘Swadeshi’ movement while reducing environmental damage.

LAUNCH OF PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY CARDS UNDER SVAMITVA SCHEME

- **CONTEXT:**
 - Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the physical distribution of property cards under the ‘SVAMITVA’ (ownership) scheme, and asserted that it is a “historic move” set to transform rural India.
- **ABOUT:**

What is SVAMITVA Scheme?

 - The SVAMITVA scheme was launched in April this year with the aim to update rural land records, providing record of rights to village households and issue property cards.
 - SVAMITVA is a central scheme of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development**.
 - It will be implemented across the country in a phased manner over the next four years, covering around 6.62 lakh villages.

- . The scheme focuses on mapping rural-inhabited lands using drones as land records are inaccurate or do not exist for vast areas across India.

Launch of physical distribution of property cards

- . The launch will enable around one lakh property holders to download their property cards through an SMS link sent on their mobile phones.
- . This would be followed by the physical distribution of property cards by respective state governments.
- . These beneficiaries are from 763 villages across six states, including 346 from Uttar Pradesh, 221 from Haryana, 100 from Maharashtra, 44 from Madhya Pradesh, 50 from Uttarakhand and two from Karnataka.

Why land records are important?

- . Even though 60 per cent of the country lives in rural areas, villagers do not have ownership documents of their homes despite records being kept of agricultural land.
- . These land records play an important role for Gram Panchayats that currently struggle with generating revenues, especially through property tax, who can better invest in the needs of local communities.
- . Only 19 per cent of potential property tax was being collected by Gram Panchayats, according to the **2018 Economic Survey**.
- . As once ownership of property becomes easy to demarcate and prove, its prices will also be fixed.
- . Then the property cards can be used to take loans, improving the tax regime at the Panchayati level.
- . Beyond that, this effort may bring about more financial stability for rural India, give accurate land records that can be used for planning, help in calibrating property tax and give a structural recourse for legal matters in property disputes.

Significance of the move

- . The move will pave the way for villagers to use property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
- . This scheme is an effective step in the direction of economic empowerment in rural India.

CHINA BACKS IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

◎ CONTEXT:

- **China has called for a ‘new forum’ to defuse tensions in the West Asia. China has reaffirmed its commitment to Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, an implicit rebuke of the U.S. for abandoning the accord.**

◎ ABOUT:

What is Iran’s nuclear deal?

- . In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
 - œ It came after years of tension over Iran’s alleged efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted that its nuclear programme was entirely peaceful, but the international community did not believe that.
- . Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

The US's withdrawal

- President Donald J. Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement in May 2018, saying it failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its role in regional wars.
- The United States reimposed sanctions and moved to wipe out Iran's oil exports, prompting Iran to resume some of its nuclear activities.
- Following the U.S. killing of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, Iran announced plans to halt most of its commitments to the deal.

What's the need of forum?

- Iran has been locked in an acrimonious relationship with Saudi Arabia, the other major West Asian power, over the war in Yemen, Iranian influence in Iraq and Saudi support for Washington's sanctions on Tehran.
- The proposed forum would "enhance mutual understanding through dialogue and explore political and diplomatic solutions to security issues in the West Asia".
- The support for the Iranian nuclear deal, negotiated by the Obama administration but ultimately abandoned by Donald Trump, would be a precondition of entry to the forum.

FATF'S KEEPS PAKISTAN ON 'ENHANCED FOLLOW-UP LIST'

◎ CONTEXT:

- Noting that Pakistan's measures against money laundering and terror financing "is not yet sufficient to justify a re-rating", a regional affiliate of the Financial Action Task Force retained the country on its "Enhanced Follow-up" list.

◎ ABOUT:

What is Enhanced follow-up list?

- "Enhanced follow-up" is an intensive process of correction that deals with members with significant deficiencies (for technical compliance or effectiveness) in their AML/CFT systems.
- The list concluded that Pakistan's progress on the 40 FATF recommendations on the effectiveness of anti-money laundering and combating financing terror (AML/CFT) system largely remained unchanged from a year before.
- While Pakistan was found to be "partially compliant" on 25 of 40 recommendations, it was found to be "non compliant" on four, "largely compliant" on nine parameters and "fully compliant" on one.

About FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
 - In 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
 - In 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Three decades after its, creation, in April 2019, FATF Ministers adopted a new, open-ended mandate for the FATF.

- . The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- . FATF has two types of lists:
 - > **Black List:** Countries that are supporting terror funding and money laundering activities are placed in the Blacklist.
 - > **Gray List:** Those countries which are not considered as the safe heaven for supporting terror funding and money laundering; included in this list. The inclusion in this list is not as severe as blacklisted.

- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
- FATF had placed Pakistan on its grey list in June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019 but the deadline was extended later on due to COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Seeking to wriggle out of the FATF's grey list, debt-ridden Pakistan in August imposed financial sanctions on 88 banned terror groups and their leaders, including 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.
 - In February, the FATF gave Pakistan, which missed 13 targets, a four-month grace period to complete its 27-point action plan against ML&TF committed with the international community.
 - In its third plenary held virtually in June, the FATF decided to keep Pakistan in the grey list as Islamabad failed to check flow of money to terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

The APG Evaluation

- . The APG Mutual Evaluations is a peer-review system to determine whether countries meet the compliance standards for money laundering and terror financing.
- . After a country submits a Mutual Evaluation report, APG members can decide to place a member either through regular or enhanced follow-up.
- . While a regular follow-up means just biennial reports, a country put under enhanced follow-up has to send four reports of compliance the following year.

Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG)

- . The Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) is a FATF style regional inter-governmental (international) body, the members of which are committed to implement international standards against money laundering (AML), the financing of terrorism (CTF) and financing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- . APG was founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- . Currently, it consists of 41 member jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region and a number of observer jurisdictions and international/regional observer organisations.

Impact of Continuation

- . Continuation on the "gray list" means it becomes increasingly difficult for the countries to get financial aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European institutions.

15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RTI ACT

- **CONTEXT:**
 - October 12, 2020 marked 15 years of the implementation of the RTI Act, which empowers people to question the Government.
- **ABOUT:**
 - **The Right to Information Act**, simply known as RTI, is a revolutionary Act that aims to promote transparency in government institutions in India.
 - The Act came into existence in 2005, after sustained efforts of anti-corruption activists.
 - The basic objective of the Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.

Progress so far

- More than 2.2 lakh cases are pending at the Central and State Information Commissions, which are the final courts of appeal under the law.
- The increasing backlog is exacerbated by the fact that most commissions are functioning at a reduced capacity, including the Central Information Commission (CIC), which has been headless since August.
- Maharashtra had the highest number of pending appeals, with over 59,000 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh (47,923) and the CIC (35,653).

What type of information may be obtained under the RTI Act?

- The type of information which may be obtained is defined under **section 2 (f)** of the Act as any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, log books, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force.

Who are covered by the Act?

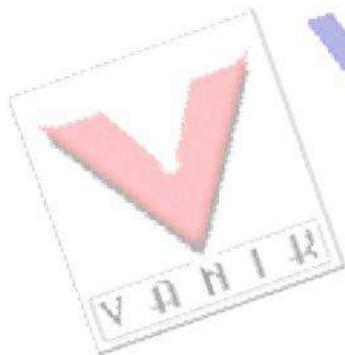
- All Constitutional authorities, ministries, departments and agencies owned and controlled by the Government and also organisations substantially financed by the Government are covered by the RTI Act.
- **Private Bodies:** Private bodies are not within the Act's ambit directly.
 - œ In a decision of **Sarbjit roy vs Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission**, the **Central Information Commission** also reaffirmed that privatised public utility companies fall within the purview of RTI.
- The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 has been extensively used by people on a range of issues – from holding the government accountable for delivery of basic rights and entitlements to questioning the highest offices of the country.
- Estimates suggest that every year 40 to 60 lakh RTI applications are filed.

Exemption

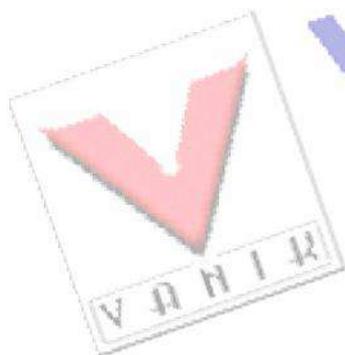
- Twenty-odd organisations are exempted from RTI.
- But all these entities are related to the country's defence and intelligence, such as RAW, BSF, CRPF, CISF, Intelligence Bureau, National Security Guard etc.

What Are Information Commissions?

- Under the RTI Act, information commissions (ICs) have been set up-



- œ the central level (Central Information Commission)
- œ the states (state information commissions)
- The commissions have the powers to-
 - œ require public authorities to provide access to information
 - œ appoint Public Information Officers (PIOs)
 - œ order an inquiry
- They also have the powers of a civil court for enforcing attendance of persons, discovery of documents, receiving evidence or affidavits, issuing summons.



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CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 4 (OCTOBER, 2020)

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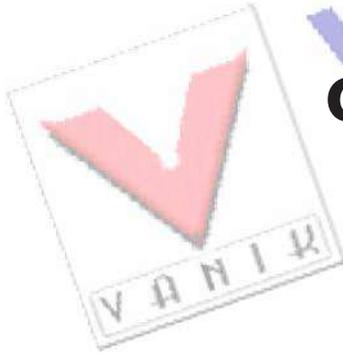
Section - A: MAINS CURRENT AFFAIRS

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)
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BANGLADESH'S ECONOMIC RISE & ITS IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA

CONTEXT

(C-DAC), Mohali at Guru AngadDev Veterinary University (GADVASU), Ludhiana.

◎ CONTEXT

The International Monetary Fund's latest World Economic Outlook has triggered much outrage in India.

- œ The provocation was the IMF's prediction that Bangladesh's per capita GDP will overtake that of India this year.
- œ The projected difference is rather small — \$1,888 to \$1,877 — and unlikely to last beyond this year.
- œ But it offered enough ammunition for a political attack on the government's economic record.

In this context, let's analyse the strategic consequences of Bangladesh's economic rise.

◎ BACKGROUND

To understand the emergence of Bangladesh as an economic power, one needs to look at the past.

- œ The decades long oppression, suppression, injustice and severe discrimination against East Pakistan by West Pakistan made the people of the East Pakistan poor and illiterate.
- œ For instance, in a typical year of between 1960 and 1970, per capita annual income was Bangladeshi Taka 450 (US\$ 5.30, based on 2020 value), nearly half of the population had a deficiency in calories intake, and the literacy rate was 17 percent only.
- œ Between 1949-50 and 1969-70, the per capita income of Bangladesh could increase at an annual rate of hardly 0.7 per cent.
- œ In fact, during the fifties, the per capita income of Bangladesh declined at an annual rate of 0.3 per cent. Per capita consumption of milk, fats, oil, fish and other protein items were extremely low in Bangladesh.
- œ In March 1972, **P.C. Verma** wrote in the **Economic and Political Weekly** that **'During the last 24 years, while Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan, its economy stagnated. The economic policy pursued by the central government of Pakistan kept it economically backward'**.
- œ Development expenditure in Bangladesh was extremely low.
- œ It is also argued that the policies taken by the central government of Pakistan in the context of

foreign aid, trade, interregional trade had severe adverse effects on Bangladesh.

◎ ANALYSIS

What made Bangladesh's economy 'grow'?

- œ **Women empowerment:** Bangladesh has made significant strides towards educating girls and giving women a greater voice, both in the household and the public sphere.

These efforts have translated into improvements in children's health and education, such that Bangladeshis' average life expectancy is now 72 years, compared to 68 for Indians and 66 for Pakistanis.

- œ **Support to grass-roots initiatives:** The Bangladesh government has supported grass-roots initiatives in economic inclusion.

- œ **Digitisation:** Among Bangladeshi adults with bank accounts, 34.1% made digital transactions in 2017, compared to an average rate of 27.8% for South Asia. Moreover, only 10.4% of Bangladeshi bank accounts are "dormant", compared to 48% of Indian bank accounts.

- œ **Successful manufacturing industry:** Another partial explanation for Bangladesh's progress is the success of its garment manufacturing industry. That is itself driven by a number of factors.

- > One notable point is that the main garment firms in Bangladesh are large—especially compared to those in India, owing largely to different labour laws.

- œ Other reasons include-
 - > inward remittances
 - > sustained growth in agriculture
 - > growth in microfinance
 - > public investment in big infrastructure projects

Thus, having been born without the law, Bangladesh offered a better environment for manufacturing firms to achieve economies of scale and create a large number of jobs. And though Bangladesh still needs much stronger regulation to protect workers from occupational hazards, the absence of a law that explicitly curtails labour-market flexibility has been a boon for job creation and manufacturing success.

Has this ever happened earlier?

- œ In 1991, when India was undergoing a severe crisis and grew by just above 1%, Bangladesh’s per capita GDP surged ahead of India’s.
- œ Since then, India again took the lead.

Is India expected to regain the lead again?

- œ The IMF’s projections show that India is likely to grow faster next year and in all likelihood again surge ahead.
- œ But, given Bangladesh’s lower population growth and faster economic growth, India and Bangladesh are likely to be neck and neck for the foreseeable future in terms of per capita income.

What are the regional implications of Bangladesh’s economic success?

- œ **Altering the world’s mental maps:** Rapid and sustained economic growth in Bangladesh has begun to alter the world’s mental maps of the subcontinent. Over the last five decades and more, South Asia, for most purposes, has meant India and Pakistan.
 - > The other countries were generally described as the “smaller” states of the region. Bangladesh was never really small; its population today stands at about 160 million. It is demographically the eighth-largest nation in the world.
 - > The economic rise of Bangladesh is changing some of that. Bangladesh provides a positive narrative about the subcontinent’s prospects.
- œ **Changing economic weights:** This year, Bangladesh’s GDP is expected to reach about \$320 billion. It’s growing economic muscle will help Dhaka steadily accumulate geopolitical salience in the years ahead.
 - > A decade ago, Pakistan’s economy was \$60 billion larger than Bangladesh. Today, Bangladesh’s weight is bigger than Pakistan by the same margin.
- œ **Economic integration:** Third, Bangladesh’s economic growth can accelerate regional integration in the eastern subcontinent.

Collective economic advance

- . The region’s prospects for a collective economic advance are rather dim due to

- > Pakistan’s opposition to economic cooperation with India
- > Pakistan’s support for cross-border terror, the main regional forum for the subcontinent, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), is in a coma.
 - . Instead of merely praying for the revival of Saarc, Delhi could usefully focus on promoting regionalism among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).
 - . The **BBIN sub-regional forum**, activated in the middle of last decade — has not advanced fast enough.
 - . It is time for Delhi and Dhaka to take a fresh look at the forum and find ways to widen the scope and pace of BBIN activity.
 - . Meanwhile, there is growing interest in Bhutan and Nepal for economic integration with Bangladesh.

- œ **New geo-politics of the Indo-Pacific:** The economic success of Bangladesh is drawing attention from a range of countries in East Asia, including China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. The US, which traditionally focused on India and Pakistan, has woken up to the possibilities in Bangladesh. The great power wooing of Dhaka is bound to intensify in the new geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.
- œ **A boost to India’s plans:** The economic rise of Bangladesh could boost India’s national plans to accelerate the development of its eastern and northeastern states.
 - > Bangladesh’s economy is now one-and-a-half times as large as that of West Bengal; better integration between the two would provide a huge boost for eastern India. So would connectivity between India’s landlocked Northeast and Bangladesh.

© **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The economic boom has given the country the confidence to surge ahead. Bangladesh, seen as a bridge between the South and south-east Asia, may not be making a big splash with its development story, but is certainly proving to be the proverbial “tortoise” that may eventually overtake many “hares” with its perseverance.

IS TRANSPARENT TAXATION THE PANACEA FOR TAX TERRORISM?

CONTEXT

In a recent report “The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019”, the United Nations pointed out that climate change is largely to blame for a near doubling of natural disasters in the past 20 years.

◎ CONTEXT

The Income-tax Act, 1961 (the Act) was amended in 2019 to introduce the concept of faceless assessment and in 2020 to provide for statutory recognition of a tax-payers’ charter and an enabling provision for faceless appeals. The “Transparent Taxation-Honouring the Honest” platform was launched on 13 August 2020, covering the aforesaid aspects.

What is Transparent Taxation?

- œ A transparent taxation regime is a pre-requisite for growth in every country and it assumes much more importance in a country like India where the phrase “tax terrorism” got coined for the country’s tax administration.
- œ While these initiatives do make an attempt to do a makeover of the tax administration by putting in place a structure for transparent taxation, questions, however, can be asked about its intention of “Honouring the Honest”.
- œ When you want to honour someone, you make him feel special and the transparent taxation scheme does not do that.

Tax structure in India

- . In India, the Tax structure is a three tier federal structure.
- . The central government, state governments, and local municipal bodies make up this structure.
- . Article 256 of the constitution states that **“No tax shall be levied or collected except by the authority of law”**.
- . The Tax structure in India consists of 3 federal parts:
 - > Central Government
 - > State Governments
 - > Local Municipal bodies
- . Taxes are determined by the Central and State Governments along with local authorities like municipal corporations. The government cannot impose any tax unless it is passed as a law.

Types of taxes

Taxes are classified under two categories namely direct and indirect taxes:

- . **Direct taxes:** Direct taxes are levied on individuals and corporate entities and cannot be transferred to others.
 - > **Example:** These include income tax, wealth tax, and gift tax.
- . **Indirect taxes:** Indirect taxes are not directly paid by the assessee to the government authorities. These are levied on goods and services and collected by intermediaries (those who sell goods or offer services).
 - > **Example:** Value Added Tax (VAT), Customs duty, Octroi, Excise duty, Service Tax

Goods and Service Tax (GST):

- . As a significant step towards the reform of indirect taxation in India, the Central Government has introduced the Goods and Service Tax (GST).
- . GST is a comprehensive **indirect tax** on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods and services throughout India and will subsume many indirect taxes levied by the Central and State Governments

Faceless Assessment

- œ Faceless assessment is faceless tax scrutiny which eliminates the interface between the taxpayer and the income tax department.
- œ Under this system, the selection of a taxpayer will be done only through systems using data analytics and AI.
- œ Moreover, **territorial jurisdiction will be abolished**, and the draft assessment order, the review and the finalisation will take place in different cities. Cases will be also be automatically allotted on a random basis.

- œ Further, there will be no need for the taxpayer to visit the income tax office or the officer.
- œ Additionally, the appellate decision will be team-based and reviewed and any assessment, other than the exceptions to the faceless scheme, will be invalid.

Faceless Appeal

- œ Under this system, appeals will be randomly allocated to any officer in the country and the identity of officers handling the appeal will remain unknown.
- œ There will also be no need to visit the officer or the office. The appellate decision will further be team-based and reviewed.
- œ Exceptions to this will be cases of serious frauds, major tax evasions, Black Money Act, Benami property etc.

What will this new scheme do?

- œ The scheme removes the **physical interaction** between the actual Assessing Officer (AO) and the taxpayer.
- œ For the taxpayer, it is only the **National e-Assessment Centre (NeAC)** which will be the contact point and all correspondence will take place between the taxpayer and the NeAC.
- œ The NeAC will, in-turn, allocate the case based on an automated allocation system to an Assessment Unit (AU) under the charge of a Regional e-Assessment Centre.
- œ The AU can then seek assistance of other specialized units i.e. the Verification Unit (VU) and Technical Unit (TU), for the purposes of assessment.
- œ The scheme also has an in-built mechanism of a review of the order by a separate Review Unit (RU).

Global Tax Landscape

- œ The global tax landscape has been witnessing exponential changes, with tax administrations around the world continuously upgrading their old tax administration system.
- œ Most **European countries** are implementing the standardisation of exchange of accounting data such as **Standard Audit File for Tax (SAF-T)** [Luxembourg, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Norway etc]
- œ **Latin American countries** are adopting transactional level reporting through e-invoicing (Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Peru etc) and Public System of Digital Bookkeeping (SPED) [Brazil]
- œ **Australia** is applying computer assisted verification/e-audit, and also many countries and tax organisations are contemplating the use of

internet of things (IoT), blockchain technology for automation of data exchange and compliance.

- œ The reforms will place India amongst the frontrunners of the facilitative tax administration system.

Merits of the Scheme

- œ **Friendly system:** With the implementation of the scheme, the waiting time at the tax office is going to be a thing of the past.
- œ **Safe game for the payers:** The taxpayer is not exposed to the whims and fancies of the Assessing Officer (AO).
- œ **Increase in quality assessments:** This scheme is going to increase the quality of the assessments manifold. With the support of the technical unit, the verification unit and the review by the review unit, the AO can actually do a quality assessment.
- œ **Proper consideration:** For the taxpayer, it gives the confidence that the response being submitted by the taxpayer is considered by an independent specialized unit set up for that purpose.
- œ **Trust building:** The mechanism of a review by the RU gives comfort that the order being passed has been reviewed thoroughly and would not have any frivolous additions.

Downside of the Scheme

- œ **Increase in appellate proceedings:** It could get more intrusive and investigative as there would be specialized units looking at the whole assessment process which, in turn, could lead to an increase in appellate proceedings.
- œ **Decision on mere written submission isn't correct:** Assessment proceedings are **quasi-judicial proceedings** and to let the authorities decide whether the case merits an opportunity for oral submissions is not correct. Mere written submissions cannot substitute a face-to-face/oral hearing.
- œ **Rise in disputes:** The whole aspect of service of notice on the registered account of the taxpayer on the portal, through emails and messages, is bound to raise disputes.

◎ CONCLUSION

The overall aim and effort of the scheme is to make India's tax system smoother. The tax administration will work to solve the problem instead of engaging every taxpayer – attempting to simplify the process and ensuring it doesn't matter who is paying tax and who is the tax officer. The reforms are aimed at bringing about more trust, fairness, transparency, efficiency, accountability, ease and convenience and therefore, more compliance.

POTHoles ON THE DIGITAL PAYMENT SUPERHIGHWAY

CONTEXT

In Budget 2020-21, the government prescribed zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), the rate merchants pay to scheme providers, for RuPay and UPI, both NPCI products, to popularise digital payments benefiting both customers and merchants.

◎ BACKGROUND

- œ A major thrust toward large value payments was effected through the Real Time Gross Settlement System, or RTGS, launched by the RBI in March 2004.
- œ The large value payments on stock trading, government bond trading and other customer payments were covered under the RTGS, providing finality of settlement, thereby reducing huge risks such as the Harshad Mehta scam; besides this, it substantially reduced the time taken for settlements.
- œ The RBI introduced National Electronic Funds Transfer, or NEFT, and bulk debits and credits to support retail payments around the same time.
- œ Now, NEFT is available round the clock and RTGS will follow from December 2020, only a few countries have achieved this.
- œ The finance minister said the government has already amended two laws, Income Tax Act and the Payments and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, to give effect to these provisions.

◎ ANALYSIS

NPCI

- œ National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.
- œ NPCI has been incorporated as a "Not for Profit" Company under the provisions of Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 (now Section 8 of Companies Act 2013), with an intention to provide infrastructure to the entire Banking system in India for physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems.
- œ Some of the payment services of NPCI are as follows- **NFS, IMPS, AePS, CTS, RuPay, UPI, Bharat BillPay, NETC, BHIM, BharatQR, BHIM Aadhaar Pay**

Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)

- œ MDR is usually 1% to 3% of the overall transaction and is the rate charged to a merchant for payment processing services on debit and credit card transactions.
- œ MDR is required and necessary because it funds the acquiring system and helps players deploy service QR codes and service the merchants.
- œ It is the cost which is paid to banks and payment service providers (PSPs), during a transaction.
- œ It is important for laying down UPI acceptance infrastructure and critical for servicing and spread of the UPI in the country.
- œ MDR is the only source of revenue for the (UPI) ecosystem.

What NPCI had to do?

- œ NPCI had to revise the interchange fee and PSP fee to zero for debit card payments through RuPay and for UPI payments in the country, leaving UPI payment apps and players with no revenue model around the infrastructure.

Expected Benefits

- œ The business establishments with annual turnover more than Rs 50 crore shall offer such low-cost digital modes of payment to their customers and no charges or Merchant Discount Rate shall be imposed on customers as well as merchants.
- œ Indigenously developed digital payment medium like RuPay and BHIM UPI will now have edge over the payment gateway promoted by foreign companies.

Drawbacks of the decision

- œ This has also caused several large players to move away from expanding the acceptance of UPI in the country, questioning its monetisation model.
- œ The waiver of the **merchant discount rate (MDR) on digital payments** will slow down its deployment in the country.
- œ Major banks and payment companies were expected to transfer a percentage of their proceeds from fees accrued from processing digital

payments to grow the payments infrastructure in Tier 3 and 4 parts of the country. But now they will be discouraged to invest in this field.

- œ Around half a billion dollars is needed in MDR for the UPI ecosystem to sustain servicing cost and compliances around Know-Your-Customer (KYC) norm, which payment companies are expected to comply with. Now the burden will fall on the payment service providers.
- œ The government left out other providers of digital payment products from this MDR prescription, which is unjustified and had adverse effects.
- œ Taking advantage of this dualism, many issuing banks switched to mainly Visa and Master cards for monetary gains.
- œ It resulted in indirect market segmentation and cartel formation.

Government and RBI Role

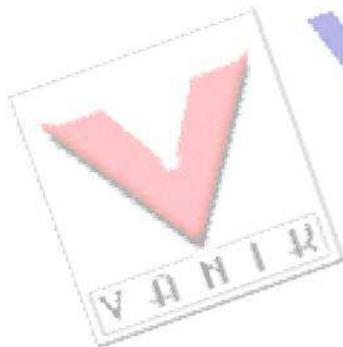
- œ Zero MDR can work out very well for the growth of the fintech industry but had additional expectations from the government.
- œ The government has to offer around INR 2000 Cr for the upcoming fiscal year, to compensate

banks for the revenue loss incurred due to MDR charges.

- œ The Reserve Bank of India earlier this year had set up a Payment Infrastructure Development Fund of Rs 500 crore to support the sector, reeling under the loss of revenue, in deploying devices in rural geographies.
- œ RBI and banks will absorb these costs from the savings that will accrue to them on account of handling less cash as people move to these digital modes of payment.

● **CONCLUSION**

The Digital mode of payment system has been crucial for the real time transfer and instant services. It had played an important role in inclusive growth and development in the form of direct benefit transfers for government schemes. The need is to promote the home driven technology and to make rules and policies more competitive for the domestic products. In this wake the decision to make Zero MDR has to be taken by considering all the players and with active government and RBI participation.



ETHOS OF JUSTICE AND ITS ADVERSARIES

CONTEXT

Rape atrocities tragically suggest that justice is in dire need of egalitarian commitment by every citizen.

◎ BACKGROUND

- œ Handing over the Hathras rape atrocity case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to proceed with the investigation indirectly questions the Uttar Pradesh (UP) police's rationality to pursue the case without prejudice.
- œ Further, it has been suggested to bring even the CBI inquiry under the supervision of the Supreme Court.
- œ The role of police is seen as **complementing the partisan position** taken by the local Savarnas whose response seems to favour the accused.
- œ The **Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court** has been more categorical in expressing its reservation about the role of the UP police in (mis) handling the Hathras rape case of a Dalit woman.
- œ According to media reports, the parents of the deceased have accused the police of being soft on the Savarna castes.
- œ As was evident from the television reporting, some of the Savarna members went ahead with conducting a mass meeting in support of the accused in the case, thus violating the law and order situation in the vicinity.
- œ In this regard, what is more astonishing is the discriminatory response that the members of the Savarna community seem to have offered not in favour of the victim but in defence of the accused.
- œ The response is more shocking on two counts: ethical and legal.
 - > Ethical conviction, if not compulsion, is necessary particularly for a sentient human being to at least refrain from siding with the accused if not expressing grief over the loss of a human being.
- œ It is not the benumbing brutal rape that has emotionalising impact on the Savarna consciousness, but what rules such consciousness is the caste affinity that suddenly jumps out of the Savarna skin.
- œ Caste consciousness weighs heavily on the moral judgment of some the members of the Savarna community, thus making the latter both indifferent and insensitive to the tragedy inflicted on the victim.
- œ An ethical initiative taken by the sentient being helps in motivating such a being to actively side with the victim.
- œ If this initiative, for subjective reasons overburdened by caste consciousness, finds it difficult to come forth, then one expects the members from Savarna community to respect the judicial system that as a common good is also available to the Savarnas.
- œ So, it is in the interest of the Savarnas to be law-abiding citizens to at least side with legal procedures.
- œ This does not seem to have happened in the Hathras rape case.

What is the ethos of justice?

- œ Ethos is societal; societal resources that have to be collectively nurtured by the enlightened citizen of India.
- œ This can be done with the presence of **moral conditions**; conditions that are constitutive of such ethos.
- œ These conditions include
 - > the conversion of a caste person into a citizen
 - > the citizen's capacity to develop willingness to recognise the burden of the judicial judgment that is likely to go against the accused and consequently against the collective interest of the community (in the present case the Savarna community).
- œ Such ethos demands that the Savarnas as the law-abiding citizen should reconcile with the consequences of the criminal of such a rape allegedly committed by the culprit, in this case the four members who incidentally belong to a Savarna caste.
- œ The ethos of justice further expects from the citizens that they be reasonable to share with others, including the Dalits, the commitment to due process of law.
- œ This commitment motivates the citizens to respect the universal principle of justice.
- œ This **universally neutral principle** safeguards everyone's, including the Savarnas', **right to feel safe and secure**.

◎ ANALYSIS

Caste consciousness weighing more than moral and legal consciousness

- œ In the present issue, the caste consciousness trumps both moral and legal consciousness.

A caste continuum

- œ India is primarily a caste society. Neither democracy nor a liberal Constitution has changed that.
- œ It's a caste society that determines its citizen's access to resources tangible and intangible (such as knowledge), and ownership of the means of production (such as land), almost exclusively on the basis of the family you are born into.

The two faces of Justice

- œ The rape atrocities against women in general and women from the most oppressed castes in particular continue to bear two faces of injustice: active and passive.
- œ The rape atrocity to which a teenager from the **most oppressed caste** in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, was subjected once again reveals the malignant face of injustice.

. Active injustice

- > Active injustice occurs in a conundrum where the tormentor is accused of being directly responsible in forcibly trapping the victim in the heinous act of rape but receives support from various sources.
- > A society that refuses to express its allegiance to the value of justice does not find the efforts that some of its members make to defend the accused morally objectionable.
- > Injustice gets intensified when the accused of rape atrocities continue to get either direct or indirect support from the social groups to which they belong.
- > Injustice begins to acquire an intensified mode when investigating agencies of the state are accused of not taking their public responsibility seriously.
- > The responsibility to stand with the victim can be seen as standing with justice.

. Passive injustice

- > Passive injustice, on the other hand, occurs when certain onlookers, by and large, choose to remain indifferent to rape or caste atrocities.
- > Thus, one may not directly support the accused at any level or in any form, and yet, such passive

spectators would contribute to injustice to the extent that their indifference to such an act would embolden the accused who then continue to reproduce tragic, traumatising experience for the oppressed.

What needs to be done?

- œ **Recognise the (Dalit's) right to live their life with social safety and human dignity:** The society needs to consider the fact that the Dalits in India in general and that of Hathras in particular are asking the Savarnas to reciprocally recognise the former's right to live their life with social safety and human dignity.
- œ **Equality of rights:** Dalits are not asking for special rights for themselves because their rights are as human as Nirbhaya's. Thus, their appeal for equality of rights is morally minimum.
- œ **Moral commitment to the judicial system:** This appeal for its effective realisation depends on the Savarnas' moral commitment to the judicial system.
- œ **Considering justice as 'a common good':** Justice is a common good that needs to be protected by both the Savarnas and the Dalits collectively. Justice as a common good should therefore motivate the Savarnas to respect such a commitment.
 - > And as a part of fulfilling this commitment, they are expected to refrain from diluting the concrete evidence or putting it into a zone of ambiguity by adding surplus details to the genuine narratives of the rape atrocity.
 - > This concern has validity not just in the immediate tragic experience of Hathras, but has been generally true in other cases as well.

◎ CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The state, in order for it to be on the side of justice, has to act on the basis of the premise of justice rather than prejudice. The fate of justice, in the particular case of Hathras, seems to hinge on the elimination of the possibility of injustice that is likely to overshadow the investigation. When rape consciousness gets reinforced by caste consciousness of the socially dominant, such overlap should add strength to the investigation heading towards justice for the victim and her family.

INDIA-US DEFENCE DEALS

CONTEXT

At 2+2 meeting, the two countries will look to push intelligence sharing pact BECA. With key deals LEMOA and COMCASA already signed, what does it mean for defence, particularly in light of LAC standoff?

◎ BACKGROUND

- œ Items on the agenda will be the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) — a pact with deep military implications.
- œ Till now, agreements known as LEMOA and COMCASA are signed.
- œ Now, with BECA, these have been dubbed the troika of foundational pacts — essentially laying the foundation for deeper military cooperation.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is BECA?

- œ The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement largely pertain to geospatial intelligence, and sharing information on maps and satellite images for defence.
- œ Anyone who sails a ship, flies an aircraft, fights wars, locates targets, responds to natural disasters, or even navigates with a cell phone relies on geospatial intelligence.
- œ Signing BECA will allow India to use the US's advanced geospatial intelligence and enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- œ It will give access to topographical and aeronautical data and products that will aid navigation and targeting.
- œ BECA will provide Indian military systems with a high-quality GPS to navigate and missiles with real-time intelligence to precisely target the adversary.
- œ This could be key for Air Force-to-Air Force cooperation.

The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)

- œ The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement was signed between India and the US in 2016.
- œ It allows the military of each country to replenish from the other's bases: access supplies, spare parts and services from the other country's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed.

- œ This is extremely useful for Navy-to-Navy cooperation, since the US and India are cooperating closely in the Indo-Pacific.

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)

- œ The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement was signed in 2018.
- œ It allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems so that Indian and US military commanders, aircraft and ships can communicate through secure networks in peace and war.
- œ COMCASA paved the way for transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India to facilitate "interoperability" between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secure data links.

- . LEMOA means one partner trusts the other enough to expose its valuable assets.
- . COMCASA means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems to connect the two militaries.
- . BECA means it can share highly classified information in real time without fear of being compromised.

What is its effect on the recent stand-off on the India-China Border?

- œ Amid the longest stand-off on the India-China border in three decades, India and the US have intensified under-the-radar intelligence and military cooperation at an unprecedented level, especially since June.
- œ The cooperation includes sharing of high-end satellite images, telephone intercepts, and data sharing of Chinese troops and weapons deployment along the 3,488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- œ The Indian defence establishment also has enhanced capability with some American equipment. The armed forces have used at least five American platforms at the LAC which are:
 - > C-17 Globemaster III for military transport
 - > Boeing's Chinook CH-47 as heavy-lift helicopters

- > Boeing's Apache as tank-killers
- > P-8I Poseidon for overland reconnaissance
- > Lockheed Martin's C-130J for airlifting troops.

Challenges in India-US relations

- œ Trade has been a major bone of contention between India and the US. India has been referred by the US, as "tariff king" that imposes "tremendously high" import duties.
- œ Removal from the GSP list amidst rising trade tensions prompted India to finally impose retaliatory tariffs on several American imports. This made the US approach the WTO against India.
- œ US have softened its position on Pakistan in the last seven months, due to the role Pakistan can play in the Afghan deal (between the US and the Taliban).
- œ India-US strong strategic partnership is also based on an idea of "shared values" of democracy, rule of law, religious freedom and protection of minorities. However, the revocation of Article 370, the new citizenship law and the NRC is testing this "shared values" principle.

Convergence in Indo-US relations

- œ A foundational military agreement that allows for the sharing of encrypted communications and equipment (COMCASA- Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement).
- œ A change in U.S. export control laws that places India in a privileged category of NATO and non-NATO U.S. allies.
- œ The signing of an Industrial Security Annex that will allow for greater collaboration among the two countries' private defence industries.
- œ A new '2+2' foreign and defence ministers dialogue.

- œ The bilateral Strategic Energy Partnership was launched in April 2018 under which India has started importing crude and LNG from the US. Now, the US is India's sixth-largest source of crude oil imports and hydrocarbons.
- œ Inauguration of the first India-US tri-service military exercise and expansion of existing military exercises.
- œ Inclusion of India and South Asia in the US Maritime Security Initiative.
- œ The US under its Pivot to Asia policy views India as an ideal balancer to check the aggressive rise of China. Therefore, the US has formulated the concept of Indo-Pacific to counter China in the South China Sea and the Indian ocean.
- œ The US has designated India as an integral part of the Indo-pacific narrative by the conception of Quad.

© WAY FORWARD

- œ Chinese aggressive behaviour being the clear and present danger, New Delhi's strategic embrace of Washington is the obvious outcome. Every administration in the last 20 years has left the Indo-US relationship in a better shape than how they inherited it.
- œ In order to counter China in the maritime domain, India needs to fully engage with the US and other partners in the Indo-pacific region, in order to preserve the freedom of navigation and the rules-based order.
- œ India-US relation remains critical for the shaping of world order in the 21st century. In order to realise the full potential of relations, the two governments must now strive to complete the unfinished agreements and set the course for a Comprehensive Strategic Global Partnership.

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)
CURRENT AFFAIRS



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ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA LISTS 62 SPECIES OF SKINKS

◎ CONTEXT

A recent publication by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) reveals that India is home to 62 species of skinks and says about 57% of all the skinks found in India (33 species) are endemic.

◎ ABOUT

• What are Skinks?

- œ With long bodies, relatively small or no legs, no pronounced neck and glossy scales, skinks are common reptiles around homes, garages, and open spaces such as parks and school playgrounds, and around lakes.
- œ Although they are common reptiles and have a prominent role in maintaining ecosystems, not much is known about their breeding habits, and ecology because identification of the species can be confusing.
- œ Skinks are highly alert, agile and fast moving and actively forage for a variety of insects and small invertebrates.
- œ Certain skinks have green blood. Unique color of the blood is result of accumulation of the green, bile pigment called biliverdin.
- œ The reduced limbs of certain skink species or the complete lack of them make their slithering movements resemble those of snakes, leading people to have incorrect notion that they are venomous.
 - > This results in several of these harmless creatures being killed.

Key-highlights of the Publication

- The publication is a result of four years of work and study of over 4,000 specimens in all 16 regional centres of ZSI and also at the Bombay Natural History Society, Indian Institute of Science, Wildlife Institute of India, and the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History.
- It also makes an attempt to 're-describe' all the 62 species with their taxonomic identification keys, distributional maps, habits, habitat and breeding biology.
- The book also gives a phylogenetic and bio-geographical analysis of distribution of these species in all the 11 bio-geographic zones of India and a detailed account on the historical studies on this group of lizards from the British era to the present.

Distribution of Skinks

- With 1,602 species of skinks across the world, making it the largest family of lizards, their occurrence in India is less than 4 % of the global diversity.
- Western Ghats: The Western Ghats are home to 24 species of which 18 are endemic to the region.
- Deccan Peninsular region: The Deccan Peninsular region is home to 19 species of which 13 are endemic.
- Northeast: There are records of 14 skink species from the northeast of which two species are endemic.

Endemic Species

- Of the 16 genera of skinks found in India, four genera are endemic.
 - œ Sepsophis (with one species) and Barkudia (with two species) are limbless skinks found in the hills and coastal plains of the eastern coast.

- œ Barkudia insularis believed to be found only in the Barkud Island in Chilka lake in Odisha.
- œ Barkudia melanosticta is endemic to Visakhapatnam.
- œ Sepsophis punctatus is endemic to the northern part of Eastern Ghats.
- . Five species of Kaestlea (blue-tailed ground skinks) are endemic to the Western Ghats and four species of Ristella (Cat skinks) also endemic to the southern part of Western Ghats.

GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX 2020

◎ **CONTEXT:**

India ranked 94 among 107 nations in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020 and continues to be in the ‘serious’ hunger category. Last year, India’s rank was 102 out of 117 countries.

- . 14 per cent of India’s population was undernourished
- . 37.4 per cent stunting rate among children under five and a wasting rate of 17.3 per cent
- . Under-five mortality rate stood at 3.7 per cent.

Affordability of nutritious diets in rural India

- . A paper published by the **International Food Policy Research Institute** has noted that three out of four Indians living in villages cannot afford diet which can be considered nutritious.
- . The paper finds that “surprisingly few” discuss the **role of diets, particularly the affordability of nutritious diets in India.**
- . 45-64% of the rural poor cannot afford a nutritious diet that meets India’s national food-based dietary guidelines
- . Among stiff problems that lend themselves to the appalling diet scenario in rural India are low wages and the significant structural problems facing India’s agricultural sector, the paper posits.
- . Currently, India uses **Consumer Price Indices (CPIs)** to measure food costs.
 - > However, the paper states, “In poor countries such as India, CPIs are heavily weighted towards nutrient-sparse starchy staples, meaning that trends in the food CPI can be misleading from a nutritional standpoint.”
 - > In comparison, according to researchers, calculating the minimum cost of a recommended diet can give better insights into nutrition and poverty in rural regions.
- . The paper arrives at the conclusion that **‘malnutrition is endemic in India,’** based on information on rural food price and wages gleaned from the 2011 National Sample Survey.

Key-takeaways

- . 17 nations, including China, Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey, Cuba and Kuwait, bagged the top rank with GHI scores of less than five.
- . India features behind Nepal (73), Pakistan (88), Bangladesh (75), Indonesia (70) among others.
- . Out of the total 107 countries, only 13 countries fare worse than India including countries like Rwanda (97), Nigeria (98), Afghanistan (99), Liberia (102), Mozambique (103), Chad (107) among others.

Global Hunger Index (GHI)

- . The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels.
- . GHI scores are based on the values of four component indicators:
 - > **undernourishment** (share of the population with insufficient caloric intake)
 - > **child wasting** (share of children under age five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition)
 - > **child stunting** (share of children under age five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition)
 - > **child mortality** (mortality rate of children under age five, partly reflecting the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments).
- . Based on the values of the four indicators, the GHI determines hunger on a 100-point scale where 0 is the best possible score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst.
- . Each country's GHI score is classified by severity, from low to extremely alarming.

IFSCA RELEASES FRAMEWORK FOR REGULATORY SANDBOX

◎ CONTEXT

The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) introduced a framework for regulatory sandbox enabling entities regulated by the watchdog to test their new solutions in a live environment and on a limited set of real customers with necessary safeguards.

◎ ABOUT:

What is in the framework?

- . Under this sandbox framework, entities operating in the capital market, banking, insurance and financial services space shall be granted certain facilities and flexibilities to experiment with innovative financial technology (fintech) solutions in a live environment with a limited set of real customers for a limited timeframe.
- . **Eligibility:** All entities (regulated as well as unregulated) operating in the capital market, banking, insurance and pension sectors as well as individuals and startups from India and FATF compliant jurisdictions, shall be eligible for participation in the Regulatory Sandbox.
- . These features shall be fortified with necessary safeguards for investor protection and risk mitigation.
- . The regulatory sandbox will operate within the **IFSC located at GIFT City.**

About IFSCA

- . The IFSCA was established on April 27 this year with head office in Gandhinagar.
 - > The first IFSC in the country has been set up at the **Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) in Gandhinagar.**
- . In December 2019, Parliament passed a Bill to set up a unified authority for regulating all financial activities at the IFSCs in the country.
- . IFSCA, with an objective to develop a **world-class fintech hub** at the IFSC located at GIFT-City in Gandhinagar (Gujarat), endeavours to encourage the promotion of fintech initiatives across the spectrum of banking, insurance, securities and fund management.

What is Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City)?

- . GIFT City is being developed as a global financial and IT Services hub, a first of its kind in India, designed to be at par or above with globally benchmarked financial centres.
- . It is a central business hub with state-of-the-art infrastructure and first of its kind operational smart city in India.
- . GIFT City is home to domestic and international, financial services and IT/ ITES sectors.
- . GIFT's Master Plan facilitates Multi Services Special Economic Zone (SEZ) with International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) status, Domestic Finance Centre and the associated Social infrastructure.
- . The purpose of setting up the GIFT City is to develop a world-class smart city that becomes a global financial hub with the development of an IFSC.

Innovation sandbox

- . As an additional step towards creating an innovation-centric ecosystem in the IFSC, IFSCA has proposed the creation of an "Innovation Sandbox".
- . It will be a testing environment where FinTech firms can test their solutions in isolation from the live market, based on market related data made available by the Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs) operating in the IFSC.
- . The Innovation Sandbox will be managed and facilitated by the MIIs operating within the IFSC.

INDIA'S FIRST SEAPLANE SERVICE TO BEGIN 31 OCT

CONTEXT:

India's first seaplane service in Gujarat is set to begin from 31 October, the anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, with the aim of providing air connectivity from the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad to the Statue of Unity in Kevadia. The service will be operated by Spicejet Airlines.

ABOUT

The Project

- . The first seaplane project of the country is part of a directive of the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation.
 - œ As per the directive, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) requested state governments of Gujarat, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and the administration of Andaman & Nicobar to propose potential locations for setting up water aerodromes to boost the tourism sector.
- . SpiceJet, which has reportedly signed a contract with a French company that is manufacturing the seaplanes, will be using a 19-seater plane which will be able to carry 14 passengers.
- . For India's first project being developed in Gujarat, the Kevadia terminal is likely to be built over 0.51 acres in the **Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd** premise in the **Panchmuli lake area**.
- . The Kevadia terminal is 200 kilometres away from Ahmedabad.
- . The terminal is proposed to have "modern amenities", and a daily footfall of 200 passengers is expected by the government.

Seaplanes operational in other countries

- Seaplanes by multiple airline carriers are operational in countries like the Philippines, Canada, Australia, the United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, United Arab Emirates, Italy, Maldives and Hongkong.
- In India, Jal Hans, a commercial seaplane service based in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was launched as a pilot project on 30 December 2010 by the then Indian Civil Aviation Minister, Praful Patel with a capacity of 10 passengers.

What is a seaplane?

- A seaplane is the amalgamation of the properties of speed and utility properties of an aeroplane and a boat, respectively.
- With fixed wings, a seaplane is equipped to take off and land on water.
- The two types of seaplane are
 - œ flying boats
 - œ floatplanes
- The bottom of a flying boat's fuselage is its main landing gear. This is usually supplemented with smaller floats near the wingtips, called wing or tip floats.
- The hull of a flying boat holds the crew, passengers, and cargo; it has many features in common with the hull of a ship or a boat.

What impact will it have on the environment?

- As seaplane operations are integrated with existing natural water bodies, ecological challenges come to the forefront.
- The **water aerodrome** is not a **listed project/activity** in the **Schedule to the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, 2006** and its amendments.
- However, the Expert Appraisal Committee was of the opinion that the activities proposed under the water aerodrome project may have a similar type of impact as that of an airport.
- During seaplane operations, there will be turbulence created in the water while takeoff and landing of seaplanes.
- This will lead to more operation process i.e. mixing of oxygen in the water. This will have a positive impact on the aquatic ecosystem near seaplane operations increasing oxygen content and decreasing carbon content in this system.

ALDABRA'S CORAL REEFS RECOVERED FASTER FROM BLEACHING, FINDS NEW RESEARCH

- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Coral reefs in the lagoon of the Seychelles' Aldabra atoll have recovered faster after the 2015-2016 bleaching event due to tolerance to heat stress, as per new research published in *Nature*.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - Aldabra, one of the world's largest atolls, is a **UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site** in Seychelles.
 - It is located in the **Indian Ocean**.
 - It comprises four main islands of coral limestone separated by narrow sea passages and encloses a large shallow lagoon.

- . It is home to a population of endemic giant Aldabra tortoises, which fluctuate to around 100,000 more than the 95,000 population of Seychelles.

Coral Reef and Climate Change

- . Climate change is the greatest threat to coral reef ecosystems.
- . Ocean warming and associated coral bleaching are one of the foremost causes of coral loss across the world.
 - œ Record-breaking high ocean temperatures, which occurred between 2014 and 2017, resulted in a prolonged and widespread coral bleaching, with the hottest temperature recorded (36.3 degrees Celsius) in early April 2016.
 - œ Half of tropical coral reefs have been lost during the past three decades and even if temperatures were kept no higher than 1.5C, between 70% and 90% of reefs would be lost by the end of the century.
- . The average global temperature is already 1C hotter than in preindustrial times.
- . In addition, climate change is intensifying periodic weather phenomena, such as El Niño warming events, increasing the temperatures reefs experience and reducing the recovery interval between bleaching events.
- . Climate models predict that global heating will continue over the coming century because our carbon emissions are expected to continue rising.

What is Bleaching?

- . Bleaching is a process where corals lose their vivid colour and turn white.
- . Coral exists in a mutually beneficial relationship with zooxanthellae algae, which live inside the coral's polyps.
- . The algae use the coral's waste products and provide the nutrients to feed them both through photosynthesis.
- . Higher sea temperatures force the coral to expel the colourful algae and, if this process is prolonged, the coral starves.
- . During a coral bleaching event, reefs lose so much zooxanthellae that they become white and experience massive die-offs.



- . Ocean acidification exacerbates the problem, eroding the reef, forcing corals to expend more energy building their calcium carbonate skeletons and slowing down their growth rate.
- . If bleaching continues for an extended period of time, corals eventually die.
- . Coral bleaching and mortality exacerbated by climate change are one of the biggest threats to oceanic biodiversity.

Significance of the findings

- . The results showed that **rapid reef recovery** of coral reefs is possible.
- . It highlighted that reducing local stressors to coral reefs can enhance their resilience against climate change.
- . The study underlines the urgency to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as time periods between bleaching events are projected to become too short for recovery, even for highly protected and more resilient areas like Aldabra.
- . With severe bleaching events expected to occur annually on 90 per cent of the world's coral reefs by 2055, such research and long-term commitment to monitoring these valuable ecosystems is critical.

CONSERVATION OF THE WORLD'S SEAGRASSES

◎ CONTEXT:

Given the significant threat to Seagrasses, there is an urgent need to take earnest measures to conserve seagrasses and their habitats.

◎ ABOUT

• What are Seagrasses?

œ Seagrasses are **flowering plants** that grow submerged in shallow marine waters like bays and lagoons.

œ **Evolution:** Terrestrial plants evolved about 850 million years ago from a group of green algae. Seagrasses evolved from terrestrial plants that recolonised the ocean 70-100 million years ago. There are 60 species belonging to four families in the order *Alismatales*.

œ Seagrasses occur all along the coastal areas of India. They are abundant in the Palk Strait and Gulf of Mannar in Tamil Nadu.

œ Though seagrasses inhabit all types of substratas (layers) from mud to rock, the lush green seagrass beds are found extensively in muddy and sandy substratas.

œ There are 21 islands in the Gulf of Mannar. Seagrasses abound in the waters around the islands of Kurusadi, Pumarichan, Pullivasal and Thalairyari. All six genera and 11 species of seagrasses are found here.

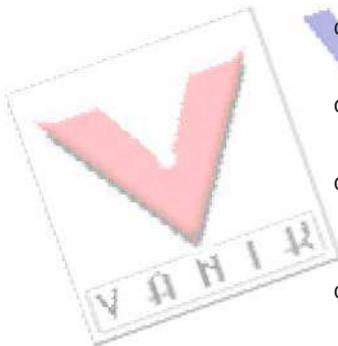
œ Some of the important seagrasses are

- > Sea Cow Grass (*Cymodocea serrulata*)
- > Thready Seagrass (*Cymodocea rotundata*)
- > Needle Seagrass (*Syringodium isoetifolium*)
- > Flat-tipped Seagrass (*Halodule uninervis*)
- > Spoon Seagrass (*Halophila ovalis*)
- > Ribbon Grass (*Enhalus acoroides*)

. These were once abundant in the Gulf of Mannar region but are now **threatened**.

Do they require Photosynthesis?

- . Like terrestrial plants, seagrass also photosynthesise and manufacture their own food and release oxygen.
- . With tiny flowers and strap-like or oval leaves, they require sunlight for photosynthesis.



Reproduction

- . Seagrasses reproduce through both sexual and asexual methods.
- . **Submarine pollination**
 - œ The pollen from the flower of the male plant is transferred to the ovary of the female flower through the sexual reproduction method.
 - œ This is known as submarine pollination. Most species undergo this process and complete their life cycle underwater.
- . **Asexual reproduction**
 - œ Seagrasses can also reproduce asexually by branching off at their rhizomes (modified subterranean plant stem that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes).
 - œ Because of this character, they can recover after being cut by grazers like dugongs or disturbed by storms.

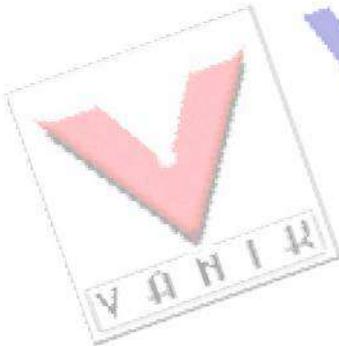
Threat to Seagrass

- . Seagrass beds are facing decline all over the world at the rate of 2-5 per cent annually.
- . Some 30,000 square kilometres of seagrass has been lost during recent decades at a global level.
- . Seagrasses face natural disturbances like grazing, storms, ice-scouring and desiccation.
- . Human disturbances like eutrophication, mechanical destruction of habitat, overfishing and release of nutrients play havoc on seagrasses.
- . Siltation, trawling, coastal engineering construction, pollution, etc. are considered to be significant causes for the deterioration of seagrasses.

Why are they considered as 'ecosystem engineers'?

Seagrasses are known for providing many ecosystem services. They are considered to be 'Ecosystem Engineers'.

- . **Maintain water quality:** Seagrasses help maintain water quality. They trap fine sediments and suspended particles in the water column and increase water clarity.
 - œ In the absence of seagrass communities, the sediments are stirred by wind and waves, decreasing water quality.
 - œ This reduced water clarity affects marine animal behaviour besides decreasing the recreational quality of coastal zones.
- . **Filter nutrients:** They filter nutrients released from land-based industries before they reach sensitive habitats like coral reefs.
- . **Stabilises the sea bottom:** Ocean bottoms without seagrasses are prone to intense wave action from currents and storms. The extensive vertical and horizontal root systems of seagrasses stabilise the sea bottom similar to land grasses that prevent soil erosion.
- . **Provide food and habitat:** Seagrasses provide food as well as habitat for fishes, octopuses, shrimp, blue crabs, oysters, sponges, sea urchins, clams, etc. They are called 'the lungs of the sea' as they release oxygen into the water through photosynthesis.
- . **Protect small beings:** Seagrass habitats protect juvenile and small adult fish from large predators and strong currents. Marine animals that live in soft sea bottom sediments also take shelter in seagrass meadows. Seagrass leaves support seaweeds by providing anchoring facilities. Seahorses and lizardfish are found living in seagrass meadows almost throughout the year.
- . **Releases nutrients after decomposition:** When it is further decomposed, it releases nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous. The dissolved nutrients in the water are absorbed by seagrasses and phytoplankton.



- **Absorbs CO₂:** Even though seagrasses occupy only 0.1 per cent of the ocean floor; they sequester up to 11 per cent of the organic carbon buried in the ocean. Seagrasses absorb 83 million tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere annually.

HYDERABAD RAINIEST PLACE IN INDIA

◎ **CONTEXT:** The city witnessed its third wettest day of October in the last 10 years and was listed as the rainiest place in the country by Skymet, an independent weather forecasting agency, after it recorded 72.5mm of rainfall.

◎ **ABOUT:**

• **Geographic details of the city**

- œ Hyderabad, the capital of the southern state Andhra Pradesh is located on the banks of **Musi River** in **Deccan plateau**.
- œ The city boasts of a unique landscape of rock formations that are almost 2.500 years old.
- œ The city has **red sandy type of soil** and falls in the **seismic zone-I** which makes the land least exposed to earthquakes.
- œ The highest point in Hyderabad is **Banjara Hills** and the contour level gradually falls from west to east which leads to the creation of a trough near the Musi River that runs through the city.
 - > This feature has facilitated sufficient water supply to the city.
- œ Hyderabad is endowed with a system of catchments.
 - > Its western edges are in the **Godavari river basin** (from Kukatpalli, Ramachandrapuram to Gachibowli)
 - > Its eastern part is in the **Krishnaa river basin**
- œ The Deccan region as a whole has a chaotic drainage pattern – water does not flow in a single direction, as the slope moves in multiple directions.

Reasons behind the heavy rainfall

- There are occasions when winds are carrying huge amounts of moisture from the Arabian Sea and dumping all across Central India, including Maharashtra, Telangana, parts of Odisha and up to Assam, triggering such events.
- Temperatures are rising everywhere and in warm conditions, the air can hold more moisture for a longer period of time.
- Then there is the issue of land use patterns, which is dominated by concrete these days. When air holds a lot of moisture, then the rains are heavy.

IMD Data

- As per India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, Hyderabad witnessed 98.3mm rainfall on October 10, 2013 and 82.6mm on October 3, 2017.
- The IMD data indicates that the city has been pounded with 356mm of rains in 18 days, which is four times higher than the normal rains.
- The city received 18 days' worth rainfall in just one day.

What's exaggerating the situation?

- **Overflow of lakes:** Much of the damage was due to the overflowing of lakes — in particular, the Hussain Sagar Lake and the breaching of storm water drains.

- . **Construction:** Construction over lake beds and encroachments of drainage channels have been identified as problems that have exacerbated flooding and inundation in the city in the past (the deluge in August 2000, for example).
- . **Lost wetlands:** Wetlands and watersheds play a vital role in absorbing excess rainfall, but regrettably, rapid urbanisation has resulted in the loss of a large portion of the wetlands.
 - œ An analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment in 2016 revealed that 3,245 hectares of water bodies were lost in Hyderabad between 1989 and 2001.

Mokshagundam Viseswarayya recommendations

- . The last time the city saw serious flooding was in August 2000, with rainfall of 24 cm in a single day, claiming 15 lives.
- . In 1908, the River Musi was in deluge, subjecting leading to as many as 15,000 deaths.
- . This calamity prompted the government to rope in veteran irrigation expert **Mokshagundam Viseswarayya** for a study on flood mitigation.
- . **Osman Sagar** and **Himayat Sagar** were built to act as flood control centres as a result of the expert's recommendations.
- . But one of his vital recommendations – a **modern drainage system** – still remains a dream.

What needs to be done?

- . Hyderabad urgently needs to **expand and remodel its drainage system**.
- . In the long term, the effects of flooding due to deluges can only be mitigated if urban planners take into account the hydro-geology of cities and ensure that construction, development and land occupation do not take place in a way that reduces the area of wetlands.

CHINA PASSES EXPORT LAW TO PROTECT NATIONAL SECURITY, TECHNOLOGY

CONTEXT:

China has passed a new law restricting sensitive exports to protect national security, a move that adds to policy tools it could wield against the US as tensions -- especially in technology -- continue to rise.

What does the Law state?

- . The law comes into effect on December 1.
- . It allows Beijing to "take reciprocal measures" against countries that abuse export controls and pose a threat to national security.
- . Technical data related to items covered will also be subject to export controls.
- . The new law, "formulated to safeguard national security and interests", adds to China's regulatory toolkit which also involves a restriction catalogue of tech exports and an unreliable entity list.
- . Where any country or region abuses export control measures to endanger the national security and interests of the People's Republic of China, (it) may take reciprocal measures.
- . **Applicability:** Export controls under the law will apply to civilian, military and nuclear products, as well as goods, technologies and services related to national security.

- œ Chinese authorities will formulate and adjust an export control list of items to be published in a “timely manner”.
- . Foreign individuals and groups can also be found liable for violating export control rules.

The ‘US’ factor

- . The economic relationship between Beijing and Washington has been roiled by Trump’s unprecedented campaign of tariffs, threats of bans and sanctions on Chinese tech firms.
- . With Trump facing a tough re-election campaign ahead of polls next month, US officials have described measures against China as national security safeguards -- prompting a backlash from Beijing.
- . In September, China launched a long-expected “unreliable entities list”, widely seen as a weapon to retaliate against the US which has used its own “entity list” to shut Huawei out of the US market.
- . Beijing’s latest measure gives it more room to hit back in US President Donald Trump’s war on Chinese tech firms, with the White House moving against popular platforms and major companies -- including apps TikTok and WeChat, tech giant Huawei and chipmaker Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp.

Implications for India

- . The extraterritorial application of the NSL can cast criminal liability on a wide range of individuals and entities.
- . Anyone, regardless of nationality or residency, can be prosecuted under the NSL for acts committed inside Hong Kong.
- . Such extraterritorial reach of the law can be viewed as unreasonable interference in the domestic affairs of other states.
- . India has an extradition treaty with Hong Kong in the form of the **1997 Surrender of Fugitives Offenders treaty**.
 - œ Hong Kong is home to a large Indian community, as well as many Indian professionals who work in the service industry, banking and finance, and shipping.
 - œ The Indian community in Hong Kong is estimated to be nearly 38,000 (including Indian nationals and those categorised as ‘People of Indian Origin’) and approximately 32,000 hold Indian passports.
 - œ Hong Kong has also emerged as a popular destination for Indian students pursuing higher studies.
 - > In 2018, the number of Indian students in Hong Kong crossed 1,100. Indian citizens also take part in student and faculty exchange programmes and joint research activities carried out by Indian and Hong Kong educational institutions.
- . In this context, India can consider if it wants to alter its visa, migration and residence policy for Indian nationals traveling to Hong Kong for work or other reasons.
- . India could also re-examine its extradition arrangements, in line with the reasoning adopted by other countries.
 - œ Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand and the United States—have announced a suspension or termination of their extradition treaties with Hong Kong.
 - œ This will enable countries to refuse requests to extradite foreign nationals to China, if they have flouted the NSL through their actions, activities and statements.
- . If India does suspend its treaty, it would amount to a conclusive positioning on where New Delhi stands on the NSL.



ISRAEL AND BAHRAIN ESTABLISH FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

◎ **CONTEXT:**

Israel and Bahrain have formally established diplomatic relations. The deal - brokered by the US - was signed in the Bahrain capital, Manama.

Recognition of Israel

- . For decades, most Arab states have boycotted Israel, insisting they would only establish ties after the Palestinian dispute was settled.
- . Bahrain is now the fourth Arab country in the Middle East - after the UAE, Egypt and Jordan - to recognise Israel since its founding in 1948.
 - œ The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: **Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.**
 - > Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively.

The mediator

- . It is important to note that the United States acted as a kind of “mediator” between the countries, openly supporting Israel.
- . The current US president, Donald Trump, stressed that he restored “trust” with his regional partners, managing to eliminate the caliphate of the Islamic State.

PAKISTAN, CHINA RE-ELECTED TO UNHRC

◎ **CONTEXT:**

Pakistan and Nepal have been re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council, while China won a seat by the smallest margin showing a drastic drop in standing.

◎ **ABOUT:**

• **What is UNHRC?**

- œ UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the **United Nations system** responsible for-
 - > strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe
 - > addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
- œ The UNHRC has “the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year”.
- œ The Human Rights Council replaced the former **United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)**.
- œ The Human Rights Council holds no fewer than three regular sessions a year, for a total of at least 10 weeks.
 - > The sessions are held at the UN Office in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

Items for Box

• **Highlights of the 75th General Assembly Session**

- > Saudi Arabia was defeated in the elections for the four seats up for vote to represent Asian and Pacific countries getting only 90 votes, seven shy of the 97 required for election.

- > Russia, which was defeated in 2016 by two votes having received only 112, made a comeback getting 158 votes.
- > Ukraine, its regional adversary, ran unopposed for the other seat.
- > Pakistan got 169 votes in the election held by secret paper ballot with COVID-19 precautions, and Nepal 150.
 - œ The two South Asian countries are members of the council with their current terms ending on December 31 and will now serve for three more years.
- > India and Bangladesh are also a member of the council last elected in 2018 to the term starting in 2019 and running out at the end of next year.
 - œ India had previously been elected to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council for the 2011-2014 and 2014-2017 terms.
- > Uzbekistan was the fourth country elected from the Asia Pacific region with 169 votes.
- > France, Britain, Cuba and Mexico were among the 15 countries elected to represent other regions at the 47-member council based in Geneva.

Membership

- . The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States, which are elected by the UNGA through a direct and secret ballot.
- . The General Assembly takes into account the contribution of the candidate states to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- . Members of the Council serve for a period of three years, and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- . The HRC has a Bureau of one President and four Vice-Presidents, representing the five regional groups.
 - œ They serve for a year, in accordance with the Council's annual cycle.

Distribution of Seats

œ African States	: 13 seats
œ Asia-Pacific States	: 13 seats
œ Latin American and Caribbean States	: 8 seats
œ Western European and other States	: 7 seats
œ Eastern European States	: 6 seats

OCS SELECTIONS OF 2018

1 SELECTION IN EVERY
2 SELECTION ARE FROM VANIK

7 IN TOP 10
11 IN TOP 20
24 IN TOP 50
47 IN TOP 100
48% SELECTION FROM VANIK



DEBASIS PANDA



RITUPARNA MOHAPATRA



AKASH KUMAR PANDA



SANTOSHINI DAS



NARAYANI P. PANDA



SHAKTI MOHAPATRA



SMARANIKA TULO



Sampat Ku. Dash



Serada P. Panda



Sidhant Narayan



Akash Pattnaik



Priti R. Rath



Rajiv Das



Abhishek Sahu



Annanya Tripathy



Prasenjit Mishra



Debajyoti Panda



Avipsa Mohanty



Dillip Satapathy



Nibedita Parida



Rashmi Prava Das



Asima Padhi



Om Prasad



Jyotibikash Dash



Narayan Behera



Suvasnigdha



Subrat Ku. Swain



Biswa Tripathy



Upasana Padhi



Bibhuti Satapathy



Avilash Purshit



Birendra Tripathy



Himanshu B. Pale



Sambit Ku. Majhi



Subhadra



Byomakesh



Bishnu Govind



Tanmaya Nayak



Ashutosh Matari



Anshuman Sarangi



Krishna Padhi



Madhusmita Nanda



Adarsh A. Tripathy



Sanishree Mallick



Om Prakash Parida



Md. Azharuddin Khan



Rajesh Ku. Samal



Tattwomasi



Amit Biswal



Agurba R. Aich



Trisandhya Patra



Bani Satabdi Dash



Harekrushna Sahu



Nirmal Ku. Bhouli



Ajit Ku. Uttaray



Manoja Ku. Behera



Ananda Ch. Palei



Sushree Supriya



Dhiren Ku. Nayak



Nivedita Nayak



Biranchi N. Jagat



Sridhar Ku. Sethi



Ananta Ku. Nayak



Abhijit S. Swain



Gyanaranjan Majhi



John Major Dalai



Jyoti P. Sethi



Arjun Majhi



Subha P. Kanungo



Deepak Ku. Jena



Rashmirani Sonopati



Subha Kanta Naik



Madhusmita Samal



Gitu Behera



Madhusmita Singh



Manaranjan Suna



Prachi



Tapan Ku. Malik



Manoj Ku. Behera



Manaswee Sethi



Bhabani Pradhan



Upanjali Majhi



Satyabrata Naik



Sagar Palo



Prasanti Pradhan



D. Satyabhusan



Prem Chand Jani



Mrutunjaya Sabar



Gouranga Ghosh



Meera Naik



Deepak Bara



Debasish Patra



Bhabesh Majhi



Vikas Mundari



Sandeep Singh



Prafulla Muduli



Smrutiranjana Tudu



Lalit Ku. Naik



Phalguni Sabar



Sunita Panda

**And Many
More Selections**