

GOVERNANCE**Modifications in Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Schemes**

Lok Sabha was informed about the Modifications in Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Schemes for SCs and OBCs.

Ministry: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

Important changes introduced in the scheme**Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC students:**

- The funding pattern – fixed sharing pattern of 60:40 between Centre and the States (90:10 in case of North Eastern States) or Notional Allocation whichever is lower.
- The Annual Family Income limit increased from Rs. 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh.
- Rates of maintenance allowances were also increased.

Post-Matric Scholarship for SC students:

- It shall continue from 2020-21 to 2025-26
- Funding pattern – sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the States (90:10 in case of NE States)
- Pre-Matric Scholarship for OBCs and Post Matric Scholarship for OBCs:
- Pre-Matric Scholarship increased from Rs.1 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakh per annum.
- Post Matric Scholarship increased from Rs.1.5 lakh to Rs.2.5 lakh per annum.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Saksham Portal and Seaweed Mission: TIFAC**

The Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) has launched two new initiatives - SAKSHAM (Shramik Shakti Manch) Job Portal and a Seaweed Mission.

- TIFAC is an autonomous organization set up in 1988 under the Department of Science & Technology to look ahead in the technology domain, assess the technology trajectories, and support innovation by networked actions in select areas of national importance.

Key Points

SAKSHAM Portal: It is a dynamic portal for jobs/mapping the skills of Shramiks (workers) vis-a-vis requirements of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and other industries all across the country. It is an all India Portal.

It will facilitate creation of 10 lakh blue collar jobs.

Features:

- High Technology Enabled: The portal with the demand and supply data uses algorithm and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, for geo spatial information on demand and availability of Shramiks, and also provides analysis on skill training programmes of Shramiks.
- Automatic Updation: The data/information pertaining to the Shramiks and the industries (especially MSME) are being updated automatically through various whatsapp and other links.

Advantages:

- For Workers: This would empower Shramiks by projecting their candidature directly to the MSMEs & other employers and would also address aspects related to their skill proficiency levels.
- It will minimise migration of Shramiks - provide job opportunity in proximate MSMEs.
- For Industry: This would also eliminate the dependence of industry on the middlemen/labour contractor for their manpower requirements.

Other Related Initiatives:

- ShramShakti Portal (Ministry of Tribal Affairs).
- ASEEM Portal (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship).
- NMIS Dashboard (National Disaster Management Authority).

Seaweeds Mission:

- Out of the global seaweed production of 32 million tons fresh weight valued around 12 billion US dollars, China produces 57%, Indonesia 28% followed by South Korea, whereas India is having a mere share of 0.01-0.02%.
- Despite several advantages, commercial seaweeds cultivation has not taken place in the country at an appropriate scale, as being practiced in South-East Asian countries.

About the Mission:

- It has been launched for commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing for value addition towards boosting the national economy.

It envisages following activities:

- Establishing model demonstration farms over one hectare for cultivation of economically important seaweeds in nearshore and onshore along the Indian coast.
- Establishment of seaweed nurseries for supplying seed material for large scale farming of economically important seaweeds in the country.
- Establishment and demonstration of processing technologies/recipes for edible seaweeds in line with consumer acceptability or cultural food habits.
- An activity on seaweed cluster development including value chain development, supply chain development, collection of data on environmental, economic and social impacts of seaweed projects in the country.
- Advantages: By an estimate, if seaweed cultivation is done in 10 million hectares or 5% of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) area of India, it can
- Provide employment to 50 million people.
- Set up a new seaweed industry.
- Contribute to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- Enhance ocean productivity.
- Abate algal blooms.
- Sequester millions of tons CO₂.
- Could produce bioethanol of 6.6 billion litres.

SOCIAL ISSUE**National Action Plan for Migrant Workers**

NITI Aayog has constituted a sub-group to prepare a National Action Plan for Migrant Workers.

Key Points

Composition: Members from various Ministries, subject experts, NGOs, and civil society organisations.

Objective: To prepare a tangible action plan to address issues related to migrant workers.

OSH Code

- Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 was subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code)
- The Code was notified in September 2020
- **Provision of OSH Code:** Decent working conditions, minimum wages, grievances redressal mechanisms, protection from abuse and exploitation, enhancement of skills, and social security.
- **Target:** All categories of organised and unorganised workers including Migrant workers.
- **Applicability:** Every establishment in which 10 or more inter-state migrant workers are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding 12 months.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change**

New research from 'The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change' highlights the benefits to health if countries adopt climate plans - Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - that are consistent with the Paris Agreement aim of limiting warming to "well below 2°C".

- The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, published annually, is an international, multidisciplinary collaboration, dedicated to monitoring the evolving health profile of climate change, and providing an independent assessment of the delivery of commitments made by governments worldwide under the Paris Agreement.
- The countries considered in the modelling study represent 50% of the world's population and 70% of the world's emissions – Brazil, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK and the US.

Key Points

- It looked at three scenarios: carrying on the current path, increasing efforts to achieve the Paris goals, and a more ambitious scenario, which put health at the heart of tackling climate change.
- Placing health as a key focus of the NDCs could present an opportunity to increase ambition and realise health co-benefits.
- Millions of lives could be saved annually by 2040 meeting Paris Agreement targets.
- Adopting policies that are consistent with achieving the Paris Agreement and prioritising health could save 6.4 million lives due to better diet, 1.6 million lives due to cleaner air, and 2.1 million lives due to increased exercise per year across nine countries.

- If India can adhere to its commitments, then the study indicates it would be able to save 4.3 lakh lives due to cleaner air and 17.41 lakh lives due to better diet.

Paris Agreement:

- It is the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate change agreement, adopted at the Paris climate conference (COP21) in December 2015.

Objective:

- To keep global temperatures “well below” 2 degrees Celsius (C) compared to pre-industrial times and “seek to limit” even more, to 1.5 degrees C.

Mechanism:

- Before the conference started, more than 180 countries had submitted pledges to cut or curb their carbon emissions through **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)**.
- The INDCs were recognized under the agreement, but are not legally binding.

Funding:

- It stipulates that developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation. Other Parties are encouraged to provide or continue to provide such support voluntarily.

India's Scenario

- According to a United Nations Report, India's per capita emissions are actually 60% lower than the global average.
- The emissions in the country grew 1.4% in 2019, much lower than its average of 3.3% per year over the last decade.
- India's INDC, to be achieved primarily, by 2030:
- To reduce the emissions intensity of the GDP by about a third.
- A total of 40% of the installed capacity for electricity will be from non-fossil fuel sources.
- India also promised an additional carbon sink (a means to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere) of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by the year 2030.

Measures taken by India to Control Emissions:

- Bharat Stage (BS) VI Norms: These are emission control standards put in place by the government to keep a check on air pollution.
- National Solar Mission: It is a major initiative of the Government of India and State Governments to promote ecologically sustainable growth while addressing India's energy security challenge.
- National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy 2018: The main objective of the policy is to provide a framework for promotion of large grid connected wind-solar photovoltaic (PV) hybrid systems for optimal and efficient utilization of wind and solar resources, transmission infrastructure and land.

INDIAN POLITY**Disability and Facility of a Scribe: SC**

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) directed the Central government to frame proper guidelines to regulate and facilitate grant of a facility of a scribe to persons with disability in writing exams.

- Earlier, the SC observed that persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward and entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education.
- Scribe is a person who writes or word processes a student's dictated answers in exams.

Key Points

- An appeal was filed by a candidate with Writer's cramp, a chronic neurological condition which causes extreme difficulty in writing.
- He was denied a scribe for the Civil Services Exam by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in 2018, on the ground that he did not come within the definition of person with benchmark disability.

Court's Ruling:**Facility of a Scribe:**

- Facility of a scribe can be provided to persons with disabilities other than those having benchmark disabilities as given under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) 2016.

- Benchmark disability refers to having at least 40% disability of any type recognized under the RPwD Act 2016.

Directions to Government:

- Issued a broader direction to the Union Government in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) to ensure the framing of proper guidelines which would regulate and facilitate the grant of a facility of a scribe to persons with disability within the meaning of Section 2(s) of RPwD Act where the nature of the disability operates to impose a barrier to the candidate writing an examination.
- Asked the ministry that while formulating procedures, it may lay down appropriate norms to ensure that the condition of the candidate is duly certified by such competent medical authority as may be prescribed so as to ensure that only genuine candidates in need of the facility are able to avail of it.
- Section 2 (s) defines ‘person with disability’. It means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.
- The principle of reasonable accommodation in the Act captures the positive obligation of the State and private parties to provide additional support to persons with disabilities to facilitate their full and effective participation in society.
- The 2016 Act has a more inclusive definition of “persons with disability” evidencing a shift from a stigmatising medical model of disability to a social model of disability which recognises that it is the societal and physical constraint that are at the heart of exclusion of persons with disabilities from full and effective participation in society.

Writer’s Cramp

- Writer’s cramp is a specific type of focal dystonia that affects one’s fingers, hand, or forearm.
- Focal dystonia of the hands is a neurological movement disorder. The brain sends incorrect information to the muscles, causing involuntary, excessive muscle contractions. These signals can make one’s hands twist into odd postures.
- Writer’s cramp is known as a task-specific dystonia. It happens almost only when one performs a particular activity like writing or typing.

HEALTH

World Unani Day

World Unani Day was celebrated on February 11, 2021.

Objective: To spread awareness about health care delivery through the Unani system of medicine through its preventive and curative philosophy.

Key Points

- World Unani Day is celebrated every year to mark the birth anniversary of Hakim Ajmal Khan.
- Principles of Unani System: It postulates the presence of four humor in the body: dam (blood), balgham (phlegm), safra (yellow bile) and sauda (black bile).
- The quality and quantity of four humor affect the state of health and disease in the body.

Origin: Greece.

In India, it was introduced by Arabs and Persians sometime around the 11th century.

BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Effects of Excessive use of Fertilizer

Investigations carried out over five decades have indicated that continuous use of nitrogenous fertilizer alone had harmful effects on soil health and crop productivity.

- Micronutrients were also becoming deficient.

Key Points

Steps taken by the government

- National Mission on Soil Health Card launched to promote soil test based balanced and judicious fertilizer application
- Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) promotes organic farming.
- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD-NER) also promotes organic farming.
- Farmers being educated on all these aspects through Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and agricultural universities.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM**National Coal Index**

Recently, the Ministry of Coal has started commercial auction of coal mines on a revenue share basis using the National Coal Index (NCI).

- NCI was rolled out in June 2020.

Key Points

- It is a price index which reflects the change of price level of coal in a particular month relative to the fixed base year.
- The base year for the NCI is Financial Year 2017-18.

Compilation:

- Prices of coal from all the sales channels of coal, including import, as existing today are taken into account for compiling the NCI.
- The amount of revenue share per tonne of coal produced from auctioned blocks would be arrived at using the NCI by means of defined formula.

Sub-Indices: NCI is composed of a set of five sub-indices:

- Three for Non Coking Coal and two for Coking Coal.
- The three sub-indices for Non Coking Coal are combined to arrive at the Index for Non Coking Coal and the two sub-indices for Coking Coal are combined to arrive at the Index for Coking Coal.
- Thus, indices are separate for Non Coking and Coking Coal.

As per the grade of coal pertaining to a mine, the appropriate sub-index is used to arrive at the revenue share.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns What is a crypto currency? Discuss the steps taken by government to regulate these currencies.(250 words)

Ans:

A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that is secured by cryptography, which makes it nearly impossible to counterfeit or double-spend.

Many cryptocurrencies are decentralized networks based on blockchain technology—a distributed ledger enforced by a disparate network of computers

Regulation of Cryptocurrencies

Recently government has proposed bringing in a law on cryptocurrencies so as to put an end to the existing ambiguity over the legality of these currencies in India.

- The government has, from time to time, suggested that it does not consider cryptocurrencies to be legal tender.
- The disapproval of cryptocurrencies by government is due to fact that such currencies are highly volatile, used for illicit Internet transactions, and wholly outside the ambit of the state.
- In 2018, the RBI did send a circular to banks directing them not to provide services for those trading in cryptocurrencies.
- Those challenging the RBI Circular in Supreme Court had argued that these were commodities and not currencies. Therefore, RBI did not have the jurisdiction.
- The circular was set aside by SC, which found it to be “disproportionate”.
- Regulatory bodies like RBI and Sebi etc also don't have a legal framework to directly regulate cryptocurrencies as they are neither currencies nor assets or securities or commodities issued by an identifiable user

Challenges

- This legal ambivalence has not, however, been able to prevent cryptocurrencies from having a growing user base in India.
- Their attraction may only grow now, given that the most well-known of them as also the most valuable, Bitcoin, has hit new peaks in price and is gaining influential followers such as Tesla founder Elon Musk.
- Cryptocurrency exchanges, which have sprung up, are reportedly lobbying with the government to make sure these currencies are regulated rather than banned outright.

Way Forward

- Smart regulation is preferable, as a ban on something that is based on a technology of distributed ledger cannot be implemented for all practical purposes.
- Even in China, where cryptocurrencies have been banned and the Internet is controlled, trading in cryptocurrencies has been low but not non-existent.
- The government must resist the idea of a ban and push for smart regulation.

DAILY QUIZ

1. With reference to Jagannath Puri temple, consider the following statements:

1. It was constructed under the regime of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.
2. It is part of the Char Dham pilgrimage.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. With reference to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), consider the following systems:

1. The committee reports to the United Nations General Assembly.
2. It receives funding only through the World Food Programme (WFP).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) **2 only**
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

3. With reference to the Tholpavakoothu, consider the following statements:

1. It is a traditional temple art in Kerala.
2. The theme is based on the Kamba Ramayana.
3. It is a shadow puppet play that represents the integration of Aryan and Dravidian cultures.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

4. Consider the following statements about World Sustainable Development Summit:

1. It is an annual flagship event of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
2. It aims to bring together global leaders and thinkers in the fields of sustainable development and energy sector on a common platform.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

- a) **1 only**
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

5. Consider the following pairs:

- | State | Shadow Puppetry |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Karnataka | Ravanachhaya |
| 2. Maharashtra | Charma Bahuli Natya |
| 3. Tamil Nadu | Thol Bommalata |
| 4. Odisha | Togalu Gombeyaata |

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

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