

GOVERNANCE**The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019**

Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that presently, there is no proposal to implement Panchayati Raj System in Sixth Schedule areas of Assam.

- In January 2019, the Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha to amend the provisions related to the Finance Commission and the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- The Sixth Schedule relates to the administration of tribal areas in the states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.**

Key Points**Proposed Amendments:**

Village and Municipal Councils: It provides for Village and Municipal Councils in addition to the District and Regional Councils. Village Councils will be established for villages or groups of villages in rural areas, and Municipal Councils will be established in urban areas of each district.

Structure of the Village and Municipal Councils:**The District Councils may make laws on various issues, including:**

- Number of Village and Municipal Councils to be formed, and their composition,
- Delimitation of constituencies for election to the Village and Municipal Councils.
- Powers and functions of Village and Municipal Councils.

Rules for Devolution of Powers:

- Governor may make rules for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Village and Municipal Councils.

Such rules may be framed in relation to:

- Preparation of plans for economic development.
- Implementation of land reforms.
- Urban and town planning.
- Regulation of land-use, among other functions.

State Finance Commission:

- The Bill provides the appointment of a Finance Commission for these states, to review the financial position of District, Village, and Municipal Councils.

The Commission will make recommendations regarding:

- Distribution of taxes between states and District Councils.
- Grants-in-aid to District, Village, and Municipal Councils from the Consolidated Fund of the state.

Elections to Councils:

- All elections to the District Councils, Regional Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils will be conducted by the State Election Commission appointed by the Governor, for these four states.

Disqualification of Members of Councils:

- The Sixth Schedule provides that the Governor may make rules for the constitution of District and Regional Councils, including qualifications for being elected as members of these councils.
- The Bill adds that the Governor may make rules for the disqualification of such members on the grounds of defection.

Sixth Schedule:

- The Sixth Schedule was originally intended for the predominantly tribal areas (tribal population over 90%) of undivided Assam, which was categorised as “excluded areas” under the Government of India Act, 1935 and was under the direct control of the Governor.
- It provides for the administration of tribal areas in **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** to safeguard the rights of the tribal population in these states.
- This special provision is provided under Article 244 (2) and Article 275 (1) of the Constitution.
- It provides for autonomy in the administration of these areas through Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).
- ADCs are empowered to make laws in respect of areas under their jurisdiction, which cover the land, forest, cultivation, inheritance, indigenous customs and traditions of tribals, etc. and also to collect land revenues and certain other taxes.
- ADCs are like miniature states having specific powers and responsibilities in respect of all the three arms of governance: Legislature, executive and judiciary.

Autonomous Districts:

- The Governor is empowered to organise and re-organise the autonomous districts. Thus, he can increase or decrease their areas or change their names or define their boundaries and so on.
- If there are different tribes in an autonomous district, the governor can divide the district into several autonomous regions.

Composition:

- Each autonomous district has a district council consisting of 30 members, of whom four are nominated by the governor and the remaining 26 are elected on the basis of adult franchise and they hold office for five years.

SOCIAL JUSTICE**The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020**

Recently, the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020 was passed unanimously by the Lok Sabha.

- The Bill seeks to regulate and standardise the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals.
- The group of allied professionals is large and the Bill is trying to regulate this field by providing dignity to their roles.

Key Points**Allied Health Professional:**

- The Bill defines an ‘allied health professional’ as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment.
- Such a professional should have obtained a diploma or degree.
- The duration of the degree/diploma should be at least 2,000 hours (over a period of two to four years).

Healthcare Professional:

- A ‘healthcare professional’ includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services.
- Such a professional should have obtained a degree.
- The duration of the degree should be at least 3,600 hours (over a period of three to six years).

Allied and Healthcare Professions:

- The Bill specifies certain categories of allied and healthcare professions as recognised categories.
- These are mentioned in the Schedule to the Bill and include life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals.
- The central government may amend this Schedule after consultation with the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Profession.
- National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions: The Bill sets up the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions..

Offences and Penalties:

- No person is allowed to practice as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner other than those enrolled in a State Register or the National Register.
- Any person who contravenes this provision will be punished with a fine of Rs. 50,000.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**Sanctions imposed on China for Uighur abuse**

The European Union, USA, Britain, and Canada imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and entities, for human rights abuses against Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang province.

The sanctions from EU, UK and Canada include travel bans and freezing of assets.

Key Points

- It is significant that the Western powers moved together.
- This is the first time the EU has imposed sanctions on China since an arms embargo after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.
- That embargo is still in place.
- EU sanctions show a hardening of stance against its largest trading partner. Also
- China has consistently denied all reports of atrocities against Uighurs, maintaining it is only “deradicalizing” elements of its population in the interests of security.

Do you know?

- Xinjiang has a large number of Uighurs, Muslims of Turkic descent.
- Over the past few decades, more and more Han Chinese have settled in Xinjinag, which saw violent clashes between them and the Uighurs.
- China is now accused of putting over a million people in internment camps to “de-Muslimise” them and make them integrate better in the Communist country.
- Survivors and human rights organisations have alleged physical, psychological and sexual torture.
- People can be sent to the camps for showing any signs of “extremism” — sporting beards, fasting during Ramzan, dressing differently from the majority, sending Eid greetings, praying “too often” etc.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Suez Canal

A large cargo ship named 'Ever Given' got stuck near the southern end of the Suez Canal due to a mishap caused by bad weather.

This is causing a huge jam of vessels at either end of the vital international trade artery.

Key Points

- The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt, to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
- The canal separates the African continent from Asia.
- It provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans.
- It is one of the world’s most heavily used shipping lanes, carrying over 12% of world trade by volume.
- It provides a crucial link for oil, natural gas and cargo being shipped from East to West.
- As per Suez Canal Authority (SCA) data, in 2020, nearly 19,000 ships, or an average of 51.5 ships per day, with a net tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes passed through the canal.
- The canal is a major source of income for Egypt’s economy, with the African country earning USD 5.61 billion in revenues from it last year.
- In 2015, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal, aiming to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.

History:

- The Suez Canal is actually the first canal that directly links the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. It was opened for navigation in November 1869.
- The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt.
- Suez Crisis, international crisis in the Middle East, precipitated in July 1956, when the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests.
- The Canal was closed five times; the last time was the most serious one since it lasted for 8 years. The Canal was then reopened for navigation in June 1975.



NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**Anti-Corruption Strategies**

Recently, the Lokpal of India organized a Webinar on 'Bringing Synergies in Anti-Corruption Strategies'.

Key Points

- Corruption can be defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can impact a nation's development in various ways.

Impact of Corruption:

Political Costs: The political costs of corruption are manifested in weakened public trust in political institutions, reduced political participation, perversion of the electoral process, restricted political choices available to citizens and loss of legitimacy of the democratic system.

Economic Costs: Corruption reduces economic efficiency by misallocation of resources in favour of rent seeking activities, increasing the cost of public transactions, acting as an additional tax on business thereby reducing investment, reducing genuine business competition.

Rent Seeking

- It is a concept in public choice theory as well as in economics, that involves seeking to increase one's share of existing wealth without creating new wealth.
- It results in reduced economic efficiency through misallocation of resources, reduced wealth-creation, lost government revenue, heightened income inequality, and potential national decline.
- Social Costs: Corruption distorts the value systems and wrongly attaches elevated status to occupations that have rent seeking opportunities. This results in a disillusioned public, a weak civil society, which attracts unscrupulous leaders to political life.
- Environmental Costs: Environmentally devastating projects are given preference in funding, because they are easy targets for siphoning off public money into private pockets.
- Issues of national security: Corruption within security agencies can lead to a threat to national security, including through distortion of procurement, recruitment of ineligible persons, providing an easy route for smuggling of weapons and terrorist elements into the country and money laundering.

Legal Framework for Fighting Corruption:

- Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 provides for penalties in relation to corruption by public servants and also for those who are involved in the abetment of an act of corruption.
- Amendment of 2018 criminalised both bribe-taking by public servants as well as bribe giving by any person.
- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 aims to prevent instances of money laundering and prohibits use of the 'proceeds of crime' in India.
- The offence of money laundering prescribes strict punishment, including imprisonment of up to 10 years and the attachment of property of accused persons (even at a preliminary stage of investigation and not necessarily after conviction).
- The Companies Act, 2013 provides for corporate governance and prevention of corruption and fraud in the corporate sector. The term 'fraud' has been given a broad definition and is a criminal offence under the Companies Act.
- In cases involving fraud specifically, the Serious Frauds Investigation Office (SFIO) has been set up under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, which is responsible for dealing with white collar crimes and offences in companies.
- The SFIO conducts investigation under the provisions of the Companies Act.
- The Indian Penal Code, 1860 sets out provisions which can be interpreted to cover bribery and fraud matters, including offences relating to criminal breach of trust and cheating.
- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 regulates the acceptance and use of foreign contributions and hospitality by individuals and corporations.
- Prior registration or prior approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs is required for receipt of foreign contributions and in the absence of such registration or approval, receipt of foreign contributions may be considered illegal.

Regulatory Framework:

- The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 provides for an establishment of an ombudsman for the central and state governments (Lokpal and Lokayuktas, respectively).

- These bodies are required to act independently from the government and have been empowered to investigate allegations of corruption against public servants, which include the prime minister and other ministers.
- The Central Vigilance Commission though created in 1964, became an independent statutory body only in 2003 by an Act of Parliament.
- Its mandate is to oversee the vigilance administration and to advise and assist the executive in matters relating to corruption.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Double Mutant Coronavirus Variant

A unique “double mutant” coronavirus variant with a combination of mutations, not seen anywhere else in the world, has been found in India.

Key Points

Meaning of Mutation:

Mutation is an alteration in the genetic material (the genome) of a cell of a living organism or of a virus that is more or less permanent and that can be transmitted to the cell's or the virus's descendants.

The genomes of organisms are all composed of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA), whereas viral genomes can be of DNA or Ribo Nucleic Acid (RNA).

Double Mutant:

- Genome sequencing of a section of virus samples by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), revealed the presence of two mutations, E484Q and L452R together, in virus samples from states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat.
- The INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID) and, if it merits, classify it as a Variant of Concern (VOC).
- So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage.

Variant of Concern

- These are variants for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.

Challenges of Double Mutant:

- The double mutation in key areas of the virus' spike protein may increase the risks and allow the virus to escape the immune system.
- The spike protein is the part of the virus that it uses to penetrate human cells.
- Presence of a VOC or suspected VOC does not automatically mean that they are causing the outbreak, but rather suggests challenges to public health measures for containment.
- While the double mutants have been associated with a reduction in vaccine efficacy as well as infectivity, their combined effect and biological implication has not yet been understood.

Other Variant:

- Also genome variation studies from Kerala have revealed the presence of other mutations.
- It is associated with the ability to help the coronavirus evade antibodies.
- The N440K mutation that is associated with immune escape has also been reported from 16 other countries, including the UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia.

Solution:

- It would require the same epidemiological and public health response of increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases & contacts as well as treatment as per “National Treatment Protocol” by the States/UTs.

Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG):

- INSACOG is a multi-laboratory, multi-agency, pan-India network to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2.
- It helps in the understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves.
- Genomic surveillance can generate a rich source of information for tracking pathogen transmission and evolution on both national and international levels.

ART AND CULTURE

Jaapi, Xorai and Gamosa

Decorative jaapis (field hats), hand-woven gamosas and bell-metal xorais are making frequent appearances in Assam due to upcoming Assembly elections.

Key Points

Jaapi: It is a conical hat made of bamboo and covered with dried tokou (a palm tree found in rainforests of Upper Assam) leaves.

Today, the bulk of Assam's jaapis are made by artisans based in a cluster of villages in Nalbari district.

Gamosa: It has wide-ranging uses. It can be used at home as a towel (uka gamosa) or in public functions (phulam/floral gamosa) to felicitate dignitaries or celebrities.

Xorai: It is made of bell-metal. It essentially is a tray with a stand at the bottom, with or without a cover. It can be found in every Assamese household.

ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY**Sundarbans**

Promises related to development of Sundarbans are being made by different political parties, ahead of West Bengal assembly elections.

- Sundarbans region was badly damaged by **Cyclone Amphan** in 2020.

Key Points

- It is a vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem in the coastal region of Bay of Bengal spread over India and Bangladesh on the delta (world's largest) of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers.
- It contains the world's largest mangrove forests.
- Much of the area has long had the status of a forest reserve, but conservation efforts in India were stepped up with the creation of the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in 1973.
- Sundarbans National Park, established in 1984, constitutes a core region within the tiger reserve; it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.
- Sunderbans was designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2001.
- Sundarban Wetland, India was recognised as the 'Wetland of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention in January 2019.
- Sunderban National Park is known for its wide range of fauna, including 260 bird species and is home to many rare and globally threatened wildlife species such as the Estuarine Crocodile, Royal Bengal Tiger, Water Monitor Lizard, Gangetic Dolphin and Olive Ridley Turtles.
- The Sunderbans Delta is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers.
- For its preservation, Discovery India and World Wide Fund (WWF) India partnered with the Government of West Bengal and local communities in the Sundarbans in 2019.

**IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM****Shigmotsav: Goa**

The Goa government has limited the Shigmotsav (Shigmo festivities) parades to three locations only (Panaji, Ponda and Mapusa), owing to rising cases of Covid-19 in the state.

Key Points

- Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa.
- Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.

Two Variants of the Festival:

Dhakto Shigmo: It is celebrated by the rural population, farmers and the labour class.

Vhadlo Shigmo: It is of greater importance and is celebrated by everyone.

Celebrations:

- Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

Invocation of Deities:

- The festival begins with 'Naman' that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village 'maand' or the village stage to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.
- It is called the 'romta mell' that moves from one village to another.

Dances:

- Folk dances like Ghode Modni (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi.

Shigmo Street Parade:

- Shigmo street parade floats as the highlight. It is held as an annual affair in the state capital, Panjim and other major cities like Margao, Mapusa, Vasco, and Ponda.
- These colour-parties usually see people dressed in vibrant clothing performing traditional folk dances to depict the historical legacy of the Maratha War that backs this festival.
- The float parades have, over the years, been a draw for tourists both domestic and international.

Other Names:**Shigmo is celebrated all over India but in different names:**

- North India - Holi.
- Assam and Bengal - Dolyatra.
- South India - Kamadahan.
- Maharashtra - Shimga.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**Qns What is the Ken Betwa River Link Project? How it will benefitted the Bundel khand region? (150 words)**

Ans:

The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers. Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna

First Phase: The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases. Under Phase-I, one of the components — Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses — will be completed.

Second Phase: While in the Phase-II, three components — Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage — will be constructed.

Estimated Cost: According to the Comprehensive Detailed Project Report, the cost of Ken-Betwa Link Project is estimated at Rs 35,111.24 crore at 2017-18 prices.

Region Benefitted: The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in **Bundelkhand**, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This project is going to immensely benefit this backward region and help bridge the regional imbalance.

Panna Tiger Reserve Affected: Out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project, 4,206 ha of area lies within the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve
Environmental Concerns: A report of the forest advisory committee said that an estimated 4.6 million trees will be cut down for the project which will adversely affect the rain in the already dry Bundelkhand region.

Clearance Requirement: Generally, 4-5 types of clearances are required for the interlinking of river projects. These are:

- Techno-economic (given by the Central Water Commission)
- Forest Clearance and Environmental clearance (Ministry of Environment & Forests)
- Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plan of Tribal Population (Ministry of Tribal Affairs)
- Wildlife clearance (Central Empowered Committee)

Benefits of Ken-Betwa Project

- The project is expected to provide
- Annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares,
- Drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people
- Generate 103 mw of hydropower.

It will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Anaemia Mukht Bharat aims to strengthen the existing mechanisms and foster newer strategies for tackling anaemia. It was launched by:
 - a) World Health Organisation
 - b) Ministry of Women and Child Development
 - c) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**
 - d) NITI Aayog
2. Consider the following statements about “MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles”:
 1. This is semi-automatic command to line-of-sight missile with range of 10 km.
 2. It is developed in India with alliance of Indian PSU Bharat Dynamics and Israeli Defence Company.
 3. Only challenge with this missile is that it gets affected by Radio Jamming.Which of the above statements are incorrect?
 - a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only
 - d) 1, 2 and 3**
3. Consider the following statements regarding Silk Production in India:
 1. India is largest producer of silk in the world.
 2. India has four varieties of silks in production, in which muga’s share is highest
 3. “Silk Samagra” a Central sector scheme by Central Silk Board has led to consistent increased production of silk in India in last five year.Choose the incorrect statements:
 - a) 1 and 2 only**
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only
 - d) All of the above
4. Consider the following statements regarding “Mission Innovation”:
 1. It is launched by World Economic Forum.
 2. It focuses on new emerging technologies in area of communication and information.
 3. Department of Biotechnology is nodal agency from India for this mission.Which of the above statements is/are correct?
 - a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 3 only**
 - d) 2 and 3 only
5. Gram Ujala, a scheme of Ministry of Power is about:
 - a) Increasing Street lights in Village.
 - b) Providing electricity connection to remainder houses.
 - c) Rehabilitation scheme for drug-addict.
 - d) Providing affordable LEDs.**