

GOVERNANCE**Depreciation in Rupee**

Recently, the Indian Rupee depreciated to a nine-month low of 75.4 against the USD, it is one of the biggest losers among the emerging market currencies.

Over the last three weeks since 22nd March 2021, Rupee has lost 4.2% against the USD.

Key Points**Rising Covid Cases:**

- Rising Covid-19 cases have emerged as a key concern. As several states are now considering more stringent lockdown measures, market participants are concerned over delay in the recovery of the economy, which was hit hard in 2020-21 by the pandemic.

Strengthening of USD:

- The strengthening of USD in line with expectations of better growth in the US economy, has also put pressure on the Rupee.

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) G-SAP:

- RBI's announcement of Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) programme to infuse liquidity has also put additional pressure on the Rupee.
- This is being read as a sort of quantitative easing policy the global central banks had followed, in which the RBI will support the government's elevated borrowing programme through infusion of liquidity.

Decreasing FPI Investments:

- Another factor that is putting additional pressure is the decreasing support of the Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs), who pumped huge inflows into Indian equity markets between October 2020 and February 2021.
- While the FPIs invested a net of Rs. 1.94 lakh crore between October 2020 and February 2021 (in the Indian markets), in the month of April 2021 they have pulled out a net of Rs 2,263 crore (till date).

Impact of Depreciating Rupee:**Losers:**

- People Importing from outside.
- People seeking foreign education.
- People travelling abroad.
- People investing abroad.
- People seeking medical treatment abroad etc.

Gainers:

- People exporting from India.
- People receiving remittances from Non Resident Indian (NRI).
- Foreign tourists as travel to India gets cheaper.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**Child Labour and Forced labour in India**

A recent study has raised the issue of ambiguity about definitions of child labour and forced labour in India, especially for sugarcane producing states of Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh.

The study was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and The Coca-Cola Company.

Key Points**Findings from the Study:**

- Authorities discounted underage child labour as "children helping parents in the field".
- Similarly, confusion was about the advance payment to migrant workers, and associated risks of forced or bonded labour.
- Most of the interventions in the sugarcane sector, either by government authorities or by the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of companies, were focused just on "improving farming techniques to ensure an increase in cane productivity".

Child Labour and Forced Labour (Meaning):

- The term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

- Forced labour is defined as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily”.
- The term forced labour includes slavery and practices similar to slavery as well as bonded labour or debt bondage.
- Bonded Labour is a practice in which employers give high-interest loans to workers who work at low wages to pay off the debt.

Provisions of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016:

- According to the Act, employment of children below the age of 14 years in any commercial enterprise is illegal.
- The Act also bars the employment of adolescents in occupations that deal with hazardous working conditions such as chemical plants and mines.
- The Act says that children can only work after school hours or during holidays and that children are allowed to work in family owned secure sectors.

Criticism:

- It is criticised that the Act allows child labour in “family or family enterprises” or allows the child to be “an artist in an audio-visual entertainment industry”.
- It excludes a section of toiling children in the unorganized sectors including agriculture as well as the household work.
- The Act does not define the hours of work and it simply states that children may work after school hours or during vacations.

Bonded Labour in India:

- The Supreme Court of India has interpreted bonded labour as the payment of wages that are below the prevailing market wages and legal minimum wages.
- The Constitution of India prohibits forced labour under Article 23 (Fundamental Rights).
- Article 23: Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour.
- Bonded labour was historically associated with rural economies where peasants from economically disadvantaged communities were bound to work for the landlords.
- Bonded labour is found to exist in both rural and urban pockets in unorganized industries such as brick kilns, stone quarries, coal mining, agricultural labour, domestic servitude, circus, and sexual slavery.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**Aahaar Kranti Mission**

Aahaar Kranti' Mission was launched recently.

Ministry: Ministry of Health

Key Points

- **Aim:** To spread the message of the need for a nutritionally balanced diet and to understand the importance of access to all local fruits and vegetables.
- **Launched by:** Vijnana Bharati (Vibha) and Global Indian Scientists' and Technocrats' Forum (GIST)
- **Motto:** 'Good Diet-Good Cognition'
- It is designed to address the problem of 'hunger and diseases in abundance'
- Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)'s Pravasi Bharatiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (Prabhaas) is collaborating along with various central and state government ministries and agencies
- **Focus:** Training teachers, who, in turn, will pass on the message to the multitudes of students, and through them to their families and finally the society at large.
- Such a strategy was adopted for the eradication of Polio and it turned out to be a grand success.

Do you know?

- Studies estimate that India produces as much as two times the amount of calories that it consumes.
- However, many in the country are still malnourished.
- The root cause of this strange phenomenon is a lack of nutritional awareness in all sections of our society.
- The United Nations has also declared 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables
- UN sustainable goal # 3 emphasizes on human well-being.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**ARIES discovered NLS1: Farthest Gamma-Ray Emitting Galaxy**

Recently, Astronomers have discovered a new active galaxy called Narrow-Line Seyfert 1 (NLS1) which has been identified as the farthest gamma-ray emitting galaxy.

Key Points

- Scientists from Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) in collaboration with researchers from other institutions, studied around 25,000 luminous Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN) from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS).
- AGN are the most powerful, long-lived objects and steady sources of luminosity in the Universe. The emission is spread widely across the electromagnetic spectrum, often peaking in the Ultra-Violet, but with significant luminosity in the x-ray and infrared bands.
- SDSS is a major multi-spectral imaging and spectroscopic redshift survey using a dedicated 2.5-m wide-angle optical telescope at Apache Point Observatory in New Mexico, United States.
- It has created the most detailed three-dimensional maps of the Universe ever made, with deep multi-color images of one third of the sky, and spectra for more than three million astronomical objects.

Findings:

- They found a unique object that emits high-energy gamma rays located at a high redshift (more than 1)
- It was identified as a gamma-ray emitting NLS1 galaxy, which is a rare entity in space.
- The new gamma-ray emitting NLS1 was formed when the Universe was only about 4.7 billion years old as compared to its current age of about 13.8 billion years.

Significance:

- Detection of gamma-ray emission from NLS1 challenges the idea of how relativistic jets are formed because NLS1s are a unique class of AGN that are powered by black holes of low mass and hosted in spiral galaxies.

Relativistic Jets:

- Supermassive black holes in the centers of some active galaxies that create powerful jets of radiation and particles travelling close to the speed of light are called relativistic jets.
- These jets are believed to be the sources of the fastest-travelling particles in the Universe that are cosmic rays.
- No method was present till date to find NLS1 at redshifts larger than one.
- This discovery opens up a new way to find gamma-ray emitting NLS1 galaxies in the early Universe.

INDIAN HISTORY**B R Ambedkar: 130th Birth Anniversary**

- The nation celebrated the 130th birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar on 14th April 2021.
- Dr. Ambedkar was a social reformer, jurist, economist, author, polyglot (knowing or using several languages) orator, a scholar and thinker of comparative religions.

Key Points

- Birth: Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born in 1891 in Mhow, Central Province (now Madhya Pradesh).
- Brief Profile:
- He is known as the Father of the Indian Constitution and was India's first Law Minister.
- He was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the new Constitution.
- He was a well-known statesman who fought for the rights of the Dalits and other socially backward classes.

Contributions:

- He led the Mahad Satyagraha in March 1927 against Hindus who were opposing the decision of the Municipal Board.
- In 1926, Municipal Board of Mahad (Maharashtra) passed an order to throw open the tank to all communities. Earlier, the untouchables were not allowed to use water from the Mahad tank.
- He participated in all three Round Table Conferences.
- In 1932, Dr. Ambedkar signed the Poona pact with Mahatma Gandhi, which abandoned the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes (Communal Award).

- However, the seats reserved for the depressed classes were increased from 71 to 147 in provincial legislatures and to 18% of the total in the Central Legislature.
- His ideas before the Hilton Young Commission served as the foundation of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Shift to Buddhism:

- He resigned from the cabinet in 1951, over differences on the Hindu Code Bill.
- He converted to Buddhism. He passed away on 6th December 1956 (Mahaparinirvan Diwas).
- Chaitya Bhoomi is a memorial to B R Ambedkar, located in Mumbai.
- He was awarded India's highest civilian honour the Bharat Ratna in 1990.

Important Works:

Journals: Mooknayak (1920), Bahishkrit Bharat (1927), Samatha (1929), Janata (1930)

Books: Annihilation of Caste, Buddha or Karl Marx, The Untouchable: Who are They and Why They Have Become Untouchables, Buddha and His Dhamma, The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women

Organisations:

- Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (1923)
- Independent Labor Party (1936)
- Scheduled Castes Federation (1942)

CLIMATE CHANGE**Place in news: Thwaites Glacier**

Researchers at Sweden's University of Gothenburg are now saying that fears related to the melting of Antarctica's Thwaites Glacier are worse than previously thought, owing to the supply of warm water flowing underneath at a rate underestimated in the past.

Key Points

- The Thwaites Glacier is 120 km wide at its broadest, fast-moving, and melting fast over the years.
- Because of its size (1.9 lakh square km), it contains enough water to raise the world sea level by more than half a metre.
- Studies have found the amount of ice flowing out of it has nearly doubled over the past 30 years.
- Today, Thwaites's melting already contributes 4% to global sea level rise each year.
- It is estimated that it would collapse into the sea in 200-900 years.
- Thwaites is important for Antarctica as it slows the ice behind it from freely flowing into the ocean.
- Because of the risk it faces — and poses — Thwaites is often called the Doomsday Glacier.

Do you know?

The grounding line is the place below a glacier at which the ice transitions between resting fully on bedrock and floating on the ocean as an ice shelf. The location of the line is a pointer to the rate of retreat of a glacier.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM**Sputnik V Vaccine**

Sputnik V, the vaccine against Covid-19 developed by Russia, has been cleared for emergency use by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

It is now the third coronavirus vaccine to get emergency use approval, after Covishield (Serum Institute of India) and Covaxin (Bharat Biotech).

Key Points

- The Sputnik V vaccine has been developed by Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow.
- It uses two different viruses that cause the common cold (adenovirus) in humans.
- The adenoviruses are weakened so they cannot replicate in humans and cannot cause disease.
- They are also modified so that the vaccine delivers a code for making the coronavirus spike protein. This aims to ensure that when the real virus tries to infect the body, it can mount an immune response in the form of antibodies.
- Sputnik uses a different vector for each of the two shots in a course of vaccination. This provides immunity with a longer duration than vaccines using the same delivery mechanism for both shots.
- The two shots are given 21 days apart.

- Sputnik V is to be stored at -18°C in its liquid form. However, in its freeze-dried form, it can be stored at 2-8°C, in a conventional refrigerator without any need to invest in additional cold-chain infrastructure.

Efficacy:

- Phase 3 trials conducted in Russia, with the results published in The Lancet, have found it has an efficacy of 91.6%.
- In India, Dr Reddy's conducted a bridging study after which it applied for emergency use approval.
- Trial participants were given the first dose (rAd26-) followed by a booster dose (rAd5-S) 21 days later.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns Discuss the benefits of empowering street vendors and the issues involved. (250 words)

Ans:

Benefits of Street Vendors

- Beneficial in Urban areas: Street vendors through their decentralized presence have a major role in reducing the cost of living in urban cities.
- Cost benefit for Consumers: By making goods and services available at doorsteps, or at places that are conveniently accessible, street vendors reduce the transaction costs of everyday purchases for consumers.
- Increased Labour Hours: Street vendors also play a significant role in increasing the labour hours of these strata.
- Brings Equity in Supply Chain: The street-vending economy also ensures equitable distribution of economic gains across its production and distribution value chains.

Issues

- Institutionalized Neglect: With urban planners focusing on building cityscapes that are attractive for investments, street vendors experience systemic and institutionalized contempt.
- Debt trap due to COVID-19: The pandemic exacerbated the condition of street vendors, most of whom had to exhaust their savings to survive, with many forced to enter a steep debt cycle.
- Harassment by administration: Traditionally, street vendors have remained a neglected lot, and have been subject to harassment by police and local governments.
- Patchy implementation of Policies: Ground level implementation of the Street Vendors Act, 2014 has remained patchy.
- Market Failure to take care of Street Vendors: There is very little institutionalized support that street vendors could get, resulting in a market failure that needed to be addressed through government intervention.

Way Ahead

- The PM SVANidhi scheme of the Union government, under which street vendors are provided a micro-credit facility, is designed to enable them to jump-start their commercial activity. So far, 2 million vendors have availed of this credit facility, with 40% of the beneficiaries being women.
- Inclusion in Urban Developmental Planning: Street Vendors role needs and strengths must be factored into every aspect of urban development planning.
- Support from Civil Society: Indian street vendors also need robust public patronage for them to achieve their full potential. Such patronage would build a strong business case for their growth and help eliminate the market failures that mark the country's street-vending landscape.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Consider the following statements about the Himalayas:

1. The Himalayas are the highest and youngest fold mountain ranges of the world.
2. The Himalayas are a series of three mountain ranges namely Himadri, Himachal and Shiwaliks.

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

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Gudi Padwa and Ugadi festivals are celebrated in Maharashtra only.

2. On Gudi Padwa, dolls made of Bamboo sticks are prepared in Maharashtrian homes.
3. Bevu-bella is a festive food prepared on Gudi Padwa and Ugadi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **2 and 3 only**
 - d) 1, 2 and 3
3. The electronic platform named e-SANTA is launched to?
- a) **Connect aqua farmers and the buyers.**
 - b) Provide online education to rural students.
 - c) Facilitate the foreign investors in india.
 - d) Bringing transparency in the power sector.
4. The Hunter Commission was set up in 1919 for investigating:
- a) The provisions of Rowlatt Act
 - b) **Jallianwala Bagh massacre**
 - c) Cases of political prisoners
 - d) Political activities
5. With reference to India Energy Dashboards (IED), consider the following statements:
1. It is an endeavour to provide single-window access to the energy data for the country.
 2. It has been launched by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- 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



VANIK-ias
Exclusive Coaching for UPSC/OPSC