

GOVERNANCE**Antimicrobial Resistance**

Recently, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare highlighted various measures to address the challenges posed by Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the country.

Key Points**About:**

- Antimicrobial resistance is the resistance acquired by any microorganism (bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasite, etc.) against antimicrobial drugs (such as antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals, antimalarials, and anthelmintics) that are used to treat infections.
- As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.
- Microorganisms that develop antimicrobial resistance are sometimes referred to as “superbugs”.

Reasons for Spread of AMR:

- The misuse of antimicrobials in medicine and inappropriate use in agriculture.
- Contamination around pharmaceutical manufacturing sites where untreated waste releases large amounts of active antimicrobials into the environment.

AMR in India:

- India, with its combination of large population, rising incomes that facilitate purchase of antibiotics, high burden of infectious diseases and easy over-the-counter access to antibiotics, is an important locus for the generation of resistance genes (such genes help bacteria in surviving on being exposed to antibiotics).
- The multi-drug resistance determinant, New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1 (NDM-1), emerged from this region to spread globally. Africa, Europe and other parts of Asia have also been affected by multi-drug resistant typhoid originating from South Asia.
- In India, over 56,000 newborn deaths each year due to sepsis are caused by organisms that are resistant to first line antibiotics.

Measures Taken to Address AMR:

- National Programme on AMR containment: Launched in 2012. Under this programme, AMR Surveillance Network has been strengthened by establishing labs in State Medical College.
- National Action Plan on AMR: It focuses on One Health approach and was launched in April 2017 with the aim of involving various stakeholder ministries/departments.
- AMR Surveillance and Research Network (AMRSN): It was launched in 2013, to generate evidence and capture trends and patterns of drug resistant infections in the country.
- AMR Research & International Collaboration: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has taken initiatives to develop new drugs /medicines through international collaborations in order to strengthen medical research in AMR. ICMR along with Research Council of Norway (RCN) initiated a joint call for research in antimicrobial resistance in 2017. ICMR along with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Germany has a joint Indo-German collaboration for research on AMR.
- Antibiotic Stewardship Program: ICMR has initiated antibiotic stewardship program (AMSP) on a pilot project across India to control misuse and overuse of antibiotics in hospital wards and ICUs. DCGI has banned 40 fixed dose combinations (FDCs) which were found inappropriate.
- Integrated One Health Surveillance Network for AMR: To assess the preparedness of Indian Veterinary laboratories to participate in integrated AMR surveillance network. ICMR has also created a veterinary standard operating procedure (Vet-SOPs) for enabling comparison of antimicrobial resistance patterns in animals and humans.
- **Others:**
 1. India has undertaken many activities like Mission Indradhanush — to address low vaccination coverage — strengthened micro-planning and additional mechanisms to improve monitoring and accountability.
 2. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) identified AMR as one of the top 10 priorities for the ministry’s collaborative work with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

WHO's take on AMR:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified AMR as one of the top ten threats to global health.

- WHO recommends that countries must prioritize their national action plans to scale up financing and capacity building efforts, put in place stronger regulatory systems and support awareness programmes for responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials by professionals in humans, animals and plants health.
- The WHO also suggests a number of steps that can be taken at various levels to reduce the impact and also limit the spread of this resistance.

ECONOMY

Special Economic Zones

Special Economic Zones (SEZ) have touched new heights in terms of performance in Exports, Investment and Employment in the last three years.

Key Points

About:

- An SEZ is a territory within a country that is typically duty-free (Fiscal Concession) and has different business and commercial laws chiefly to encourage investment and create employment.
- SEZs are created also to better administer these areas, thereby increasing the ease of doing business.

SEZs in India:

- Asia's first EPZ (Export Processing Zones) was established in 1965 at Kandla, Gujarat.
- While these EPZs had a similar structure to SEZs, the government began to establish SEZs in 2000 under the Foreign Trade Policy to redress the infrastructural and bureaucratic challenges that were seen to have limited the success of EPZs.
- The Special Economic Zones Act was passed in 2005. The Act came into force along with the SEZ Rules in 2006.
- However, SEZs were operational in India from 2000 to 2006 (under the Foreign Trade Policy).
- India's SEZs were structured closely with China's successful model.
- Presently, 379 SEZs are notified, out of which 265 are operational. About 64% of the SEZs are located in five states – Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- The Board of Approval is the apex body and is headed by the Secretary, Department of Commerce (Ministry of Commerce and Industry).
- The Baba Kalyani led committee was constituted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to study the existing SEZ policy of India and had submitted its recommendations in November 2018. It was set up with a broad objective to evaluate the SEZ policy towards making it WTO (World Trade Organisation) -compatible and to bring in global best practices to maximise capacity utilisation and to maximise potential output of the SEZs.

Objectives of the SEZ Act:

- To create additional economic activity.
- To boost the export of goods and services.
- To generate employment.
- To boost domestic and foreign investments.
- To develop infrastructure facilities.

Major Incentives and Facilities Available to SEZ:

- Duty free import/domestic procurement of goods for development, operation and maintenance of SEZ units.
- Exemption from various taxes like Income Tax, minimum alternate tax, etc.
- External commercial borrowing by SEZ units upto US \$ 500 million in a year without any maturity restriction through recognized banking channels.
- Single window clearance for Central and State level approvals.

Performance so far:

- Exports: Exports of Rs. 22,840 Crore (2005-06) has increased to Rs. 7,59,524 Crore (2020-21).
- Investment: Investment of Rs. 4,035.51 Crore (2005-06) has increased to Rs. 6,17,499 Crore (2020-21).
- Employment: Employment from 1,34,704 persons (2005-06) has increased to 23,58,136 persons (2020-21).

Challenges:

- **Unutilized Land in SEZs:** Due to lack of demand for SEZ space and disruptions caused by the pandemic.
- **Existence of Multiple Models:** There are multiple models of economic zones such as SEZ, coastal economic zone, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, National Investment and Manufacturing Zone, food park and textile park which pose challenges in integrating the various models.
- **Competition from ASEAN Countries:**
 1. In the past few years, many of the ASEAN countries have tweaked their policies to attract global players to invest into their SEZs and have also worked on a developmental set of their skilling initiatives.
 2. Consequently, Indian SEZs have lost some of their competitive advantages globally and hence need to have fresher policies.

Way Forward

- Promotion of MSME investments in SEZs by linking with MSME schemes and allowing alternate sectors to invest in sector-specific SEZs is among the recommendations by the Baba Kalyani Committee on SEZs.
- It had also batted for additional enablers and procedural relaxations as well as granting SEZs infrastructure status to improve their access to finance and enable long-term borrowings.

2. Investment Climate in India

Recently, the US State Department released a report titled '2021 Investment Climate Statements: India'. The report lauded the structural economic reforms carried by the Government of India, in the wake of economic slowdown and Covid-19 pandemic. However, the report asserts that India remains a challenging place to do business. Earlier, the UK India Business Council (UKIBC) emphasized that some of the reforms under the Atmanirbhar Bharat programme could have negative consequences for the UK and all multinational companies.

Key Points**Recent Economic Reforms:**

- **Privatization:** In February 2021, the Government of India announced plans to raise \$2.4 billion through an ambitious privatization program that would dramatically reduce the government's role in the economy.
- **FDI Liberalization:** In August 2019, the government announced a new package of liberalization measures and brought a number of sectors including coal mining and contract manufacturing under the automatic route. In March 2021, Parliament further liberalized India's insurance sector, increasing the foreign direct investment (FDI) limits to 74% from 49%.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan:** In order to combat economic slowdown pertaining to Covid-19, the Government of India launched Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
 1. This programme envisages extensive social welfare and economic stimulus programs and increased spending on infrastructure and public health.
 2. Further, it aims towards cutting down import dependence by focusing on substitution while improving safety compliance and quality goods to gain global market share.
- **PLI Scheme:** The government also adopted production linked incentives to promote manufacturing in pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles, electronics, and other sectors.
- **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code:** The introduction and implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016 led to an overhaul of the previous framework on insolvency and paved the way for much-needed reforms. Among the areas where India has improved the most in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Ranking the past three years has been under the resolving insolvency metric.
- **Matching Global Standards of Arbitration:** The government of India passed Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2021. The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.
- **Sovereign Wealth Funds:** In 2016, the Indian government established the National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF), touted as India's first sovereign wealth fund to promote investments in the infrastructure sector. The government agreed to contribute \$3 billion to the fund, while an additional \$3 billion will be raised from the private sector.

- **Labour Code:** In the budget 2021 the government announced that the four labour codes shall be implemented in India with effect from 1st April 2021. These labour codes envisage simplifying the country's archaic labour laws and give impetus to economic activity without compromising with the workers' benefits.
- **Other Measures for Improving Ease of Doing Business:**
 1. **Invest India:** It is the official investment promotion and facilitation agency which works with investors through their investment lifecycle to provide support with market entry strategies, industry analysis, partner search, and policy advocacy as required.
 2. **PRAGATI Initiative:** To fast-track the approval process, especially in the case of major projects, the government of India started the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI initiative). It is a digital, multi-modal platform to speed the government's approval process.

Economic Policies Bothering Foreign Investors:

- **Controversial Decisions:** Recently, the government took two controversial decisions i.e. removal of special constitutional status from the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019. However, India maintains that the CAA and scrapping of Article 370 was its internal matter and that "no foreign party has any locus standi on issues pertaining to India's sovereignty."
- **New Protectionist Measures:** Several sectors of the economy continue to retain equity limits for foreign capital as well as management and control restrictions, which deter investment. For example, in 2016, India allowed up to 100% FDI in domestic airlines, but the issue of substantial ownership and effective control (SOEC) rules that mandate majority control by Indian nationals have not yet been clarified.
- **Bilateral Investment Agreements and Taxation Treaties:** India adopted a new model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) in December 2015, following several adverse rulings in international arbitration proceedings. The new model BIT does not allow foreign investors to use investor-state dispute settlement methods, and instead requires foreign investors first to exhaust all local judicial and administrative remedies before entering international arbitration.
- **Procurement Rules that Limit Competitive Choices:** Preferential Market Access (PMA) for government procurement has created substantial challenges for foreign firms operating in India. State-owned "Public Sector Undertakings" and the government accord a 20% price preference to vendors utilizing more than 50% local content.
- **Intellectual Property Rights:** India remained on the Priority Watch List in the 2020 Special 301 Report due to concerns over weak intellectual property (IP) protection and enforcement.
- **Corruption:** India, with a score of 40, ranked 86 among 180 countries in Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perception Index.
- **Other Issues:** There are other issues that restrict the expansion in bilateral trade. For example, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and Indian-specific standards not aligned with international standards.

Way Forward

- The Government of India should foster an attractive and reliable investment climate by reducing barriers to investment and minimizing bureaucratic hurdles for businesses.
- The Governments of India and the other countries should cooperate in areas such as standards, trade facilitation, competition, and anti-dumping practices.

POLITY

Secrecy of Vote

Recently, the Supreme Court of India held that in any election, be it to Parliament or State legislature, the maintenance of secrecy of voting is "a must". It reiterated its 2013 judgement in the People's Union for Civil Liberties case.

Key Points

Highlights of the Latest Judgement:

- **Part of Fundamental Right:** The secrecy is a part of the fundamental right of freedom of expression. The confidentiality of choice strengthened democracy.
- **Part of Basic Structure:** Democracy and free elections were a part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution. The concept of 'basic structure' came into existence in the landmark judgment in Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala case (1973).

- **On Booth Capturing:** Booth capturing and/or bogus voting should be dealt with iron hands, because it ultimately affects the rule of law and democracy. Nobody can be permitted to dilute the right to free and fair election.
- **On Unlawful Assembly:** Once the unlawful assembly is established in prosecution of the common object, each member of the unlawful assembly is guilty of the offence of rioting.
 1. The use of the force, even though it be the slightest possible character by any one member of the assembly, once established as unlawful constitutes rioting.
 2. It is not necessary that force or violence must be by all but the liability accrues to all the members of the unlawful assembly.
 3. The definition of 'unlawful assembly', according to Indian law, is laid down in Section 141 of the Indian Penal Code.

Judgement in People's Union for Civil Liberties case, 2013:

- The two main key components that came out of the Supreme Court judgment are:
 1. Right to vote also includes a right not to vote i.e right to reject.
 2. Right to secrecy is an integral part of a free and fair election.
- **Right to Reject:** It implies that a voter while voting has every right not to opt for any of the candidates during an election.
 1. Such a right implies a choice to remain neutral. It has its genesis in freedom of speech and expression.
 2. Introducing a 'None of the Above' (NOTA) button can increase the public participation in an electoral process.
- **Right to Secrecy:**
 1. It is a central right of an elector to cast his vote without fear of reprisal, duress or coercion as per Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Protection of the elector's identity and affording secrecy is therefore integral to free and fair elections.
 2. An arbitrary distinction between the voter who casts his vote and the voter who does not cast his vote is violative of Article 14, Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
 3. Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25(b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights deals with the "Right to secrecy".

Other Related Judgement:

1. Earlier, the SC held that the principle of secrecy of ballots is an important postulate of constitutional democracy and referred to Section 94 of the Representation of People Act (RPA) 1951.
2. The section upholds the privilege of the voters to maintain confidentiality about their choice of the vote.

BIODIVERSITY & ENVIRONMENT**Supreme Court Dismisses Plea Against Ban On Firecrackers**

Recently, the Supreme Court has dismissed appeals challenging the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) order which had imposed a complete ban on the sale and use of all firecrackers during the Covid-19 pandemic in NCR and other cities in India. The order was given in the context of a poor Air Quality Index (AQI), owing to the burning of crackers.

Key Points**Background:**

- In 2017, the Supreme court had banned the use and sale of toxic crackers during the celebration owing to diwali, Christmas, etc., on the basis of a petition filed by two infants.
- 1. They had said the air pollution caused by various factors, especially firecrackers, had made Delhi a gas chamber.
- 2. They pleaded for their right to life.
- The court dismissed arguments that bursting crackers was a fundamental right and an essential practice during religious festivals like Diwali.
- 1. The court held that the Right to Freedom of Religion (Article 25) is subject to Right to life (Article 21).
- 2. If a particular religious practice is threatening the health and lives of people, such practice is not entitled to protection under Article 25.

NGT Order:

- The NGT in its December 2020 order said that only green crackers (which use less polluting raw materials) would be permitted for Christmas and New Year, in areas where the ambient air quality was in the moderate or below categories. However, owing to Covid-19 pandemic, NGT again prohibited the sale and use of firecrackers.
- The firecrackers companies argued that the ban was an impediment to their livelihoods.
- In reply to the argument, the Tribunal had reasoned that the “right to business is not absolute (Article 19 (1) (g)) and there is no right to violate air quality and noise level norms.

Harmful Effects of Crackers:

- Firecrackers contain lots of heavy metals and toxic chemicals like cadmium, lead, chromium, aluminium, magnesium, nitrates, carbon monoxide, copper, potassium, sodium, zinc oxide, manganese dioxide etc.
- These chemicals, if inhaled or ingested, can cause severe effects in the health of people like heart diseases, respiratory or nervous system disorders.
- Further, noise pollution causes restlessness, temporary or permanent hearing loss, high blood pressure; sleep disturbance and even poor cognitive development in kids.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM**National Security Council**

Amid the Pegasus Controversy, it was reported that the Union Government's expenditure on the National Security Council secretariat (NSCS) increased ten fold in 2017-18 to Rs 333 crores from Rs 33 cr. in 2016-17.

Key Points**About:**

- NSC of India is a three-tiered organization that oversees political, economic, energy and security issues of strategic concern.
- The National Security Advisor (NSA) presides over the NSC, and is also the primary advisor to the prime minister. The current National Security Advisor is Ajit Doval.

Formation: It was formed in 1999, where all aspects of national security are deliberated upon.

Three tier Structure:

1. NSC comprises the three tier structure- Strategic Policy Group (SPG), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and the National Security Council Secretariat.
2. The SPG chaired by the Cabinet Secretary is the principal forum for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of the relevant inputs.
3. The NSAB undertakes long-term analysis and provides perspectives on issues of national security.

Function: It operates within the executive office of the prime minister of India, liaising between the government's executive branch and the intelligence services, advising leadership on intelligence and security issues.

Members: The Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, External Affairs and Finance are its members.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. What the Pegasus surveillance scandal means for Indian democracy? Analyse.(250 words)

Ans:

Introduction

‘Pegasus Project’ report produced by the collaborative investigation of journalists from around the world has given rise to speculations of extensive surveillance by the Indian government. As per reports of some national and international news agencies there appeared on a leaked list of “potential” or actual targets for spying by the Israeli company NSO’s Pegasus spyware.

As per claims, at least a 1,000 Indian phone numbers are in a list of potential targets of surveillance using the Pegasus spyware sold by Israeli company the NSO Group to “vetted governments” with the approval of the Israeli government.

Body**Implications of Pegasus spyware issue on Indian democracy:**

- **Allegations against Supreme Court:** There are allegations that the phones of the woman who had complained of sexual harassment against a former Chief Justice, and her family, might have been subject to surveillance. If true, it casts a serious doubt on the sanctity of the Supreme Court’s proceedings.

- **Integrity of democratic institutions:** A system in which political opponents, officials of the Election Commission, and political colleagues could be subject to this kind of surveillance, will inspire less confidence in the democratic institutions too.
- **National security implications:** The explosive growth of surveillance technology vendors is a global security and human rights problem. Even if authorized (which is doubtful), the use of Pegasus poses a national security risk. Who else will have access to that information? How much geopolitics is now influenced by these shadowy cyber weapons?
- **Foreign relations:** The issue also indicates that surveillance rules in India are not as per global standards. This hinders India's ability to enter data sharing agreements, which allow government agencies to access data stored overseas when required, with other countries. Surveillance rules in sync with the global standards would allow India to enter into executive data sharing agreements with countries like the US which require judicial review of surveillance—thereby solving the inequitable present data access scenarios where law enforcement authorities in India have to deal with a long process to access data stored abroad,

Measures needed:

- **Global agreement:** It is not primarily China, but democratic states like Israel and UK, that are selling technologies for deepening the surveillance powers of states. There needs to be a global compact, or at least one amongst democratic states, on regulating these technologies.
- **Role of the court:** The Pegasus allegations are debilitating in their potential effect on the trust that underpins the pact between government and people. The court must play its role in ensuring that the questions are answered, and due process is followed, no matter where it might lead to.
- **Surveillance reforms:** Following reform measures need to be implemented—The review committee consists of officers of the executive branch of the government. The oversight committee, to enable a working separation of powers, must consist of other branches of government, i.e. the legislative and judiciary. Neither the IT Act nor the 2009 Interception Rules, provide a grievance redressal mechanism for surveilled persons. Due to the strict confidentiality provisions, surveilled persons find it impossible to ascertain and prove whether they were being surveilled.
- **Checks and balances on discretionary powers:** The law allows for surveillance for reasons including the interest of public safety where it is necessary or expedient so to do in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India” and for “public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of an offence”. This is a lot of discretion here, which often leads to abuse of these powers. Hence, laws should be amended and narrowed by providing an indicative list of what constitutes abuse of surveillance or interception powers, with stringent penal consequences.

Conclusion

The whole incident brought forward the issue of digital security and the ways to achieve it with minimum loopholes. It is necessary to be self-aware about digital security because compromise in that could lead to a situation of total surveillance. Setting stringent cybersecurity standards to protect individuals and institutions of national importance, to make sure that the unity of the nation and the integrity of the individuals stay safe and secure. The largest democracy in the world cannot be at the mercy of a shady, private company.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) was constituted under National Waterways Act, 2016 by parliament of India.
2. It has launched a new portal ‘Least Available Depth Information System’ (LADIS) for easy movement of vessels in the national Waterways.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

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

Q2. With reference to laws for surveillance in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Telegraph Act deals with intercepting calls.
2. Under the IT Act, 2000, all electronic transmission of data can be intercepted.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

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

Q3. The committee headed by Subhash Chandra Garg was in news recently, is related to which of the following?

- a. New Information Technology rules
- b. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
- c. Counteracting military cyber espionage
- d. **Cryptocurrency ban in India**

Q4. The 'SIMS' portal was in news recently, is related to:

- a. Regulatory sandbox
- b. Digital payment information
- c. E-commerce
- d. **Drug seizure data**

Q5. The Government of India is implementing 'Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Padhati' (BPKP) as a sub scheme under which of the following?

- a. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana
- b. National Project on Organic Farming
- c. **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana**
- d. National Programme for Organic Production
- e.



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