

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**Rail Link between Nepal and India**

The first stretch of rail link between Nepal and India is ready to resume on the neighbouring country's first-ever broad gauge passenger service (Jainagar-Bijalpura-Bardibas railway project).

Key Points**Background:**

- The rail link between Nepal and India has been popular since the early 20th century.
- In 1937, the British had built a narrow gauge line to ferry cargo, mainly logs, from Nepal to India.
- However, over time it became a popular passenger service before it was stopped in 2014 for conversion to broad gauge.

Revamped Project:

- **First Stretch:** A 34-km line between Bihar's Jainagar and Nepal's Kurtha, with the Hindu pilgrimage city of Janakpur Dham (in Nepal) in between.
- **Second Stretch:** A 17 km of railway line from Kurtha to Bijalpura is also getting the finishing touches. For the remaining portion up to Bardibas, land is being handed over to IRCON International Limited (a Government of India Undertaking).
- **Cost of Project:** The construction cost of Rs 784 crore for the entire stretch is being borne by India in the form of a grant to Nepal.
- **Managing Body:** The Konkan Railway Corporation Limited has got the contract for operations and maintenance of the line, and will train and develop manpower provided by Nepal, as per the bilateral understanding.

Electric Rail Track:

- MoUs have been signed between both the governments for laying an electric rail track linking Kathmandu with Raxaul (Bihar) in India.

Freight Train Services:

- India and Nepal have signed a Letter of Exchange (LoE) to the India-Nepal Rail Services Agreement (RSA) 2004.
- It will allow all authorized cargo train operators to utilize the Indian railway network to carry Nepal's container and other freight - both bilateral between Indian and Nepal or third country from Indian ports to Nepal.

Significance:

- The line is being seen as a small link to a larger plan of deepening India's ties with Nepal through the Railways, bypassing the influence of other neighbouring countries in this strategically vital region.

Other Connectivity Project

- **Inland Waterways:** India is looking to develop the inland waterways for the movement of cargo, within the framework of trade and transit arrangements, providing additional access to sea for Nepal calling it linking Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) with Sagar (Indian Ocean).
- **Petroleum Pipeline:** In 2019, India and Nepal had jointly inaugurated a cross-border petroleum products pipeline.
 1. Pipeline carries petroleum products from Motihari (Bihar) in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal.
 2. This is South Asia's first cross-border petroleum products pipeline.

SOCIAL ISSUE**Digital Divide in Education**

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) warned that the Digital Divide caused by online classes will defeat the fundamental right of every poor child to study in mainstream schools. SC lamented how the Right to Education of little children now depends on who can afford "gadgets" for online classes and who cannot.

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, as schools increasingly turned to online education the digital divide produced stark consequences.

Key Points

Digital Divide:

- The digital divide refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology and those that don't have access. It is the gap that exists between individuals who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who lack access.
- Digital divides exist between developed and developing countries, urban and rural populations, young and educated versus older and less-educated individuals, and men and women.
- In India the urban-rural divide is the single biggest factor in the digital divide.

Pre-Pandemic Divide:

- Students from the urban area and rich families were learning the concepts of science with the help of modern technology and other e-learning platforms while schools in rural areas and poor families were lacking in basic infrastructure facilities like toilets, proper classrooms and drinking water.
- The condition of female children in rural India was even worse than the male child, it was seen that many girls were dropping out of schools as the menstruation cycle starts as schools do not have basic facilities like toilets, primary care in schools.
- In some areas, students had to walk for 10-12 Kms to avail basic education.

Post-Pandemic Divide:

- In urban areas and rich families where students and teachers are acquainted with digital education and due to comparatively high income, families can easily afford digital devices for education as well as they can afford various e-learning platforms.
- The situation is the opposite in rural areas and poor families. In most cases, smartphones are owned by earning members, thus students are finding lots of difficulties in attending online lectures. Those who can afford smartphones are facing network issues.
- In some cases, teachers are unfamiliar with online education technology.

Consequences:

• **The Disadvantaged Bear the Brunt:**

1. Children belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS]/Disadvantaged Groups [DG] had to suffer the consequence of not having to fully pursue their education or worse still drop out because of the lack of access to Internet and computer.
2. They even run the danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.

• **Unfair Competitive Edge:**

1. The poor will remain void of crucial information presented online concerning academia, and thus they will always lag, and this may be summed up by poor performance.
2. Hence superior students who can access the internet have an unfair competitive edge over their less privileged counterparts.

• **Disparity in Learning:**

1. The people in lower socio-economic classes are disadvantaged and have to undergo long hours of cumbersome studies in meeting the objectives of the course.
2. While the rich can easily access schooling materials online and work on their programs in a flash.

- **Decreased Productivity Among the Poor:** Most underdeveloped countries or the rural areas tend to produce half-baked graduates because of inadequate training due to limited research abilities as connectivity to the internet is limited besides having low cadre training equipment.

Constitutional Provisions for Right To Education:

- Originally Part IV of Indian Constitution, Article 45 and Article 39 (f) of DPSP (Directive Principles of State Policy), had a provision for state funded as well as equitable and accessible education.
 - The 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002, provided Right to Education as a fundamental right in Part-III of the Constitution.
1. It inserted Article 21A which made Right to Education a fundamental right for children between 6-14 years.

2. It provided for a follow-up legislation Right to Education Act 2009.

Related Initiatives:

1. National Education Policy, 2020.
2. Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA).
3. PM eVidya.
4. Swayam Prabha TV Channel
5. SWAYAM portal

Way Forward

- Even though schools are now reopening gradually due to the receding curve of the pandemic, the “need to provide adequate computer-based equipment together with access to online facilities for children is of utmost importance”.
- Priority should be given to the less advantaged students who do not have access to e-learning.
- Genuine efforts must be invested to ensure every child gets good quality equitable education as a fundamental right.
- A solution has to be devised at all levels of the Government, State and Centre, to ensure that adequate facilities are made available to children across social strata so that access to education is not denied to those who lack resources.

2.Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021

Recently, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021 was released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

The Index considers data from 109 countries and 5.9 billion people.

Key Notes**Global Data:**

1. 1.3 billion people are multidimensionally poor.
2. About half (644 million) are children under age 18.
3. Nearly 85% live in Sub-Saharan Africa (556 million) or South Asia (532 million).
4. More than 67% live in middle-income countries.

Periodic Reduction in Poverty: Of the 80 countries and five billion people for which there is data over time, 70 reduced MPI in at least one period, with the fastest changes coming from Sierra Leone (2013-2017), followed by Togo (2013/2014-2017).

Absolute Reduction in Poverty:

- Some countries saw the fastest absolute reductions in their poorest regions-helping to fulfil their pledge to leave no one behind. These areas include North Central in Liberia (2013–2019/2020) and Province 2 in Nepal (2016–2019).

Poverty Across Ethnic and Racial groups:

- In some cases, disparities in multidimensional poverty across ethnic and racial groups are greater than disparities across geographical subnational regions.
- Within a country, multidimensional poverty among different ethnic groups can vary immensely.
- Therefore different policy actions are needed to reduce multidimensional poverty.

Education:

- Worldwide about two-thirds of multidimensionally poor people (836 million) live in households where no woman or girl completed at least six years of schooling. 227 million live in India.
- One-sixth of all multidimensionally poor people (215 million) live in households in which at least one boy or man has completed six or more years of schooling but no girl or woman has.
- The report also finds that women and girls living in multidimensional poverty are at higher risk of intimate partner violence.

Living Standard:

- 1 billion are exposed to solid cooking fuels, another billion live with inadequate sanitation and another billion have substandard housing.

- 788 million live in a household with at least one undernourished person.
- 568 million lack improved drinking water within a 30-minute round trip walk.

Effect of Covid:

- The Covid-19 pandemic has eroded development progress around the world, and we are still grappling to understand its full impacts.
- It has exposed the weaknesses in social protections systems, education, and workers' vulnerability around the world. These weaknesses are deepest in countries with higher levels of multidimensional poverty.

Indian Scenario:

- As castes and tribes are a more prevalent line of social stratification in India, this index presents the incidence and intensity of multidimensional poverty among castes and tribes and among individuals who are not members of any caste or tribe.
- In India five out of six multidimensionally poor people are from lower tribes or castes.
 1. 9.4% of the Scheduled Tribe group lives in multidimensional poverty
 2. 33.3% of the Scheduled Caste group lives in multidimensional poverty.
 3. 27.2% of the Other Backward Class group lives in multidimensional poverty.
- In India close to 12% of the population live in female-headed households.

ENVIRONMENT & BIODIVERSITY**Right to Clean Environment**

Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) unanimously voted for recognising a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a Universal Human Right. If recognised by all, the right will be the first of its kind in more than 70 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

UDHR: The 30 rights and freedoms include civil and political rights, like the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy and economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education, etc.

Key Points**Background:**

- The concept of human rights in general emerged after the Second World War (1939-45), but the right to a healthy environment, as one of those human rights, was never a priority.
- The right to a clean environment is rooted in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, popularly called as the Magna Carta of human environment. It contained principles and recommendations for environmental policy.
- 'Caring for the Earth 1991' and the 'Earth Summit' of 1992" also declared that human beings are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

About:

- The human right to a healthy environment brings together the environmental dimensions of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights, and protects the core elements of the natural environment that enable a life of dignity.
- The right to life (Article 21) has been used in a diversified manner in India. It includes, inter alia, the right to survive as a species, quality of life, the right to live with dignity and the right to livelihood. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution states: 'No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedures established by law.'
- Further the Constitutional (forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976 incorporated two significant articles viz. Article 48-A and 51A (g) thereby making the Indian Constitution the first in the world conferring constitutional status to the environment protection.
 1. **Article 48-A:** The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
 2. **Article 51A(g):** It is a duty of every citizen to protect and preserve the environment.

Environment Protection Laws in India:

1. Wildlife (protection) Act, 1972.
2. Water (prevention and control of pollution) Act, 1974.
3. The Forest (conservation) Act, 1989.

4. The Air (prevention and control of pollution) Act, 1981
5. The Environment (protection) Act, 1986.
6. The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010

Environmental Principles:

- **Inter-generational Equity:** It states that every generation holds Earth in common, therefore its resources should be used judiciously and for the common benefit of all.
- **Polluter Pays Principle:** It states that the polluter should bear the cost of damage caused by it to the natural environment.
- **Precautionary Principle:** It states that even in the absence of scientific evidence, measures must be taken to anticipate and prevent the causes of environmental degradation. It is the social responsibility of the State to protect the public from any plausible risk.
- **Public trust Doctrine:** It states that resources like water, air, sea and forest have a great importance to the general public that it would be unjustified to make it the subject of private ownership. It poses a duty on the State to protect such resources for the benefit of all and not to permit any commercial use of it.
- **Sustainable Development Principle:** It states that the State should try to strike a balance between development and environment.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Mission Lucy: NASA

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is set to launch 'Lucy', its first mission to explore the Jupiter Trojan Asteroids.

Key Notes

Mission Lucy:

- **Duration:** The solar-powered mission is estimated to be over 12 years long, during which the spacecraft will visit eight asteroids covering a distance of about 6.3 billion km to deepen the understanding of the "young solar system".
- **Name and Launch:** The mission is named after 'Lucy', a 3.2 million-year-old ancestor who belonged to a species of hominins (which include humans and their ancestors). The spacecraft will be launched on an Atlas V 401 rocket.
- **Asteroid Donald Johnson:** The spacecraft's first encounter will be with an asteroid that lies in the main belt that can be found between Mars and Jupiter. This asteroid is named 'Donald Johnson' after the paleoanthropologist who discovered the fossilised remains of 'Lucy'.

Significance:

- The Trojan asteroids are believed to be formed from the same material that led to the formation of planets nearly 4 billion years ago when the solar system was formed.
- Therefore, the mission is designed to understand the composition of the diverse asteroids that are a part of the Trojan asteroid swarms, to determine the mass and densities of the materials and to look for and study the satellites and rings that may orbit the Trojan asteroids.
- Studying them will help scientists understand its origins and evolution, and why it looks the way it does.

Asteroids

About:

- Asteroids are rocky objects that orbit the Sun, much smaller than planets. They are also called minor planets.

Categories:

- **Main Belt of Asteroids:** First, those found in the main asteroid belt, between Mars and Jupiter. This region is estimated to contain somewhere between 1.1-1.9 million asteroids.
- **Trojan:**
 1. The second group is that of trojans (the name comes from Greek mythology), which are asteroids that share an orbit with a larger planet.

2. NASA reports the presence of Jupiter, Neptune and Mars trojans. In 2011, they reported an Earth trojan as well.
3. The Jupiter asteroids can be found in what are referred to as “swarms” that lead and follow the planet Jupiter along its orbit around the Sun. ‘Lucy’ will reach the first swarm of these asteroids that precede Jupiter by August 2027.
4. These asteroids are believed to be the remnants of the early solar system.
 - **Near-Earth Asteroids:**
 1. The third classification of asteroids is under Near-Earth Asteroids (NEA), which has orbits that pass close to the Earth. Those that cross the Earth’s orbit are called Earth-crossers.
 2. More than 10,000 such asteroids are known, of which over 1,400 are classified as Potentially Hazardous Asteroids (PHAs).

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Recently, under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Tourism Ministry sanctioned 5 projects of Rs 325.53 crore for Buddhist circuit development. It has also organised a Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour as part of the Union government’s Dekho Apna Desh initiative.

The tour covers the destinations Gaya-Bodhgaya, Rajgir-Nalanda in Bihar as well as Sarnath-Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Points

About:

- Swadesh Darshan, a Central Sector Scheme, was launched in 2014 -15 for integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country. This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India etc.
- Under the scheme, the Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to State Governments/Union Territory Administrations for infrastructure development of circuits.
- One of the objectives of the scheme is to develop theme-based tourist circuits on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Tourism Circuits:

- Under the scheme, fifteen thematic circuits have been identified- Buddhist Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Desert Circuit, Eco Circuit, Heritage Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Krishna Circuit, North East Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Tirthankar Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Wildlife Circuit.

Other Related Initiatives:

- **PRASHAD Scheme:** 30 projects for development of infrastructure have also been undertaken under the PRASHAD Scheme.
- **Iconic Tourist Sites:** Buddhist Sites at Bodhgaya, Ajanta & Ellora have been identified to be developed as Iconic Tourist Sites (aimed at enhancing India’s soft power).
- **Buddhist Conclave:** Buddhist Conclave is organised every alternate year with the objective of promoting India as a Buddhist Destination and major markets around the globe.
- **Dekho Apna Desh’ Initiative:** It was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2020 to encourage the citizens to travel widely within the country thus enabling the development of Domestic Tourism tourist facilities and infrastructure.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. The lack of transparency remains a major impediment in utilisation of public funds, which in turns affects our developmental goals. Justify. (150 words)

Ans:

Introduction

‘Public money ought to be touched with the most scrupulous conscientiousness of honor. It is not the produce of riches only, but of the hard earnings of labour and poverty.’ – Thomas Paine.

Efficient utilisation of public funds is necessary for judicious use of financial resources to satisfy the needs of the present society in such a way that it doesn’t compromise the capability of societies of future generations to meet their own needs.

Body:

Lack of transparency remains a major impediment in utilization of public funds due to

Corruption

- The large sum of money earmarked for public activities are taken away by officials as well as politicians in form of bribes. This results in funds not able to contribute towards development.
- As our former Prime Minister had remarked, “only 15 paisa for every rupee spent on public welfare actually reaches to the masses”, thereby highlighting the gravity of ineffective utilization of funds in our country
- Ex: Money allocated for construction of houses for poor is consumed by corrupt officials.

Political rivalry

- Sometimes political class indulges in act of vendetta where they do not cooperate in allocation or release of funds to their opposition. They hope to reap the anger against their opponents for their political gains.
- Ex: Government in power not allocating developmental funds to opposition MLAs.

Diversification

- The funds allocated to one activity is diverted to another in order to meet strict control over finances.
- Ex: Funds allocated to road repair is diverted to giving freebies.

Red-tapism

- Colonial bureaucratic attitude sometimes acts as hinderance in carrying out developmental activities. They complicate the process due to which funds are not properly utilized.

Measures to enhance of transparency and accountability:

- It is vital to uphold the ‘social contract’. Citizens must be confident that they are protected by the law and that public institutions and servants will act in accordance with it.
- Public institutions with operational independence from political control are more likely to be trusted to act in the public interest.
- A well-informed population is far more likely to be confident about investing for the future. This means both providing appropriate information in ways that are accessible and easy to understand, and educating citizens as well as inviting them to participate in decision making.
- Effective public financial management requires that decision-makers, citizens and other stakeholders, are able to ‘follow the money’ to see how taxes were raised, why decisions to spend it were made, how the money was actually spent and what was bought.
- Where government plans and activities are measured against expected outputs and outcomes, citizens and other stakeholders will be able to judge the performance of government. This, in turn, provides the basis for feedback and continuous improvement mechanisms.
- For the public to believe that public officials will do the right thing, a range of controls to promote integrity and ethical behaviour and to tackle fraud and corruption are required.
- Most importantly, the public must believe that individuals will be held responsible for their actions, no matter who they are.
- A climate for investment is created when investors believe a state is stable, well run and that political and fiscal risks will be managed effectively.

Conclusion:

It is important for citizens to trust that the government will act in their interest, if they are to invest their own private resources and so create economic activity and employment. Efficient utilisation of public funds requires a number of reforms for good governance such as decentralisation of power, plugging legislative loopholes, strengthening the public Institutions like CVC and RTI, enhancing administrative accountability and making society more democratic. These reforms could make society more sustainable in the long run.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following statements about Malaria:

1. It is a serious and sometimes fatal disease caused by a Virus.
2. Mosquirix is the first and, to date, the only vaccine shown to have the capability of significantly reducing malaria.

Which of the statements give above is/are correct?

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

Q2. 'Blue Berets or Blue Helmets', often in the news, is

- a. a division of World Health Organization
- b. a non-governmental international organization
- c. an inter-governmental agency sponsored by European Union
- d. a role held by the Department of Peace Operations**

Q3. The National Health Authority or the NHA has been set-up to implement the

- a. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission
- b. Pradhan Mantri Matri Vandana Yojana
- c. Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**
- d. All of the above

Q4. In which of the following state is Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary located?

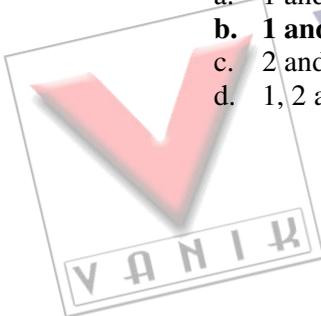
- a. Orissa
- b. Jharkhand
- c. Chhattisgarh**
- d. Telangana

Q5. Consider the following statements about Jim Corbett National Park:

- 1. It is located in Nainital district of Uttarakhand.
- 2. It encompasses the Patli Dun valley formed by the Ganga River.
- 3. It is the oldest national park in India.

Which of the statement given above is/are correct?

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



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