

GOVERNANCE

CharDham Project

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has spoken of the need to balance national security concerns with environmental issues in the context of the Army's request to expand the CharDham Project (CDP) roads leading to the Indo-China border. The request came in the context of construction being carried out by China across the border. However, expansion of roads has been opposed by an NGO citing environmental concerns.

Key Points

About Chardham Project:

- **Objective:** CharDham Pariyojana aims to "improve the connectivity to the Chardham pilgrimage centres (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri) in the Himalayas, making journeys to these centres safer, faster and more convenient. It will widen almost 900 km of highways connecting the pilgrimage sites and the Tanakpur-Pithoragarh stretch of National Highway (NH) 125, a part of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route.
- **Role in National Security:** This project can act as the strategic feeder roads which connect the India-China border with the Army camps in Dehradun and Meerut where missile bases and heavy machinery are located.
- **Implementing Agencies:** Uttarakhand State Public Works Department (PWD), Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL). NHIDCL is a fully owned company of the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.

Environmental Concerns About the Project:

- The project may destroy about 690 hectares of forests with 55,000 trees and evacuate an estimated 20 million cubic metres of soil.
- Ruthless harvesting or uprooting of vegetation in the widening of roads can prove to be perilous for the biodiversity and regional ecology. Birds like Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*, Schedule-I), Tragopans (*Tragopan melanocephalus* & *Tragopan satyra*, Schedule-I), and various species of Vultures (Schedule-I) along with endangered fish Golden Mahseer (*Tor putitora*) are among the wonderful species found there.
- While there is no link between the CharDham project and the recent glacier broken tragedy of Chamoli, indiscriminate blasting during road construction makes cracks in soil and rocks that may enhance the possibility of flash-flood in the future.

2. MPLAD Scheme

The Union Cabinet has approved the restoration of the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for the remaining part of Financial Year 2021-22 till 2025-26. It will be co-terminus with the period of the 15th Finance Commission.

The scheme was suspended for two financial years (2020-21 and 2021-22).

Key Points

About:

- It is a Central Sector Scheme which was announced in December 1993.

Objective:

- To enable MPs to recommend works of developmental nature with emphasis on the creation of durable community assets in the areas of drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads, etc. primarily in their Constituencies. Since June 2016, the MPLAD funds can also be used for implementation of the schemes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), conservation of water through rain water harvesting and Sansad Aadarsh Gram Yojana, etc.

Implementation:

- The process under MPLADS starts with the Members of Parliament recommending works to the Nodal District Authority.
- The Nodal District concerned is responsible for implementing the eligible works recommended by the Members of Parliament and maintaining the details of individual works executed and amount spent under the Scheme.

Functioning:

- Each year, MPs receive Rs. 5 crore in two instalments of Rs. 2.5 crore each. Funds under MPLADS are non-lapsable.

- Lok Sabha MPs have to recommend the district authorities projects in their Lok Sabha constituencies, while Rajya Sabha MPs have to spend it in the state that has elected them to the House.
- Nominated Members of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the country.

Significance of Restoration of the Scheme:

- It will restart fulfilling the aspirations and developmental requirements of the local community and creation of durable assets, which is the primary objective of the MPLADS.
- It will also help in reviving the local economy.

Issues with MPLADS:

- **Implementation Lapses:** The Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG) has flagged instances of financial mismanagement and artificial inflation of amounts spent.
- **No Statutory Backing:** The scheme is not governed by any statutory law and is subject to the whims and fancies of the government of the day.
- **Monitoring and Regulation:** The scheme was launched for promoting participatory development but there is no indicator available to measure level of participation.
- **Breach of Federalism:** MPLADS encroaches upon the domain of local self governing institutions and thereby violates Part IX and IX-A of the Constitution.
- **Conflict with Doctrine of Separation of Powers:** MPs are getting involved in executive functions.

INTERNATINAL RELATION

Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan

Recently, the Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan was held. The meeting was composed of National Security Advisors' (NSA) of regional countries and chaired by the Indian NSA. The meeting called for "urgent humanitarian assistance" to the Afghan people and urged close cooperation and consultation among the regional countries over the Afghan scenario.

This is the third meeting of the Regional Security Dialogue (the earlier two meetings were held in Iran, in 2018 and 2019).

Key Points

- **Invited Participants:** Afghanistan's neighbours such as Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and other key players including Russia, and China.
- **Need:** After the withdrawal of US forces and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, India is concerned about security in the region. There is a possibility of terrorism spreading from the territory of Afghanistan.

Highlights of the Delhi Declaration:

- **Secure and Stable Afghanistan:** Reiterated strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan while emphasising the respect for sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs.
- **Condemning Terrorism:** Committed to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Urged the regional members to ensure that Afghanistan would never become a safe haven for global terrorism.
- **Ensuring Fundamental Rights:** That is, the fundamental rights of women, children and minority communities are not violated. The assistance should be provided in non-discriminatory manner across all sections of the Afghan society.
- **Collective Cooperation:** Called for a collective cooperation against the menace of radicalization, extremism, separatism and drug trafficking in the region.
- **Central Role of UN:** Recalling the relevant UN Resolutions on Afghanistan, they noted that the United Nations' (UN) continued presence in the country must be preserved. The recent UN Resolution 2593 reiterates the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan, including those individuals and entities designated pursuant to resolution 1267.

Response by the Regional Countries:

- Russia held that multiple dialogue mechanisms "should not complicate" the unfolding situation in the Taliban controlled Afghanistan.
- Pakistan and China too were invited to participate in the consultation but both stayed away.
- Moreover, there was no representation from the erstwhile Afghan government or the Taliban.

- Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan's NSAs did not mention the word terrorism at all in their opening statements.

Other Afghan Peace Process Framework:

- Troika Plus Meeting on Afghanistan:** The U.S.-Russia-China-Pakistan grouping on Afghanistan peace process.
- Moscow Format on Afghanistan:** It was set up by Russia for Peace and stability in Afghanistan in the year 2017. It is a six-party mechanism. It involved Russia, India, Afghanistan, Iran, China and Pakistan.

Way Forward

- Inclusive Government:** The solution comes only through the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups.
- Russian Support:** Russia has cultivated links with the Taliban in recent years. India would need Russia's support in any form of direct engagement with the Taliban.
- Bonhomie With China:** India should talk with China, with the objective of finding a political settlement and lasting stability in Afghanistan.
- Engaging with Taliban:** Talking to the Taliban would allow India to seek security guarantees from the insurgents in return for continued development assistance or other pledges as well as explore the possibility of the Taliban's autonomy from Pakistan.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

New Draft Guidelines for Accessibility Standards

Recently, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued draft guidelines for new accessibility standards. Under these almost all television channels are required to ensure that they either carry captions or sign language to help the hearing impaired understand the programming.

Earlier, the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to make NCERT textbooks accessible to hearing-impaired students in sign language.

Key Points

About Draft Guidelines:

- Objective:** The draft is released in process to get the "Accessibility Standards for Television Programmes for Hearing Impaired". These standards will be notified under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, to make television content more inclusive for persons with hearing disabilities.
- Scope:** All programming or content like music shows, debates, scripted/ unscripted reality shows, etc.; and advertisements and teleshopping content will have to adhere to these standards.
- Exemptions:** Live and deferred live content/events such as sports: live news, events like live music shows, award shows, live reality shows, etc. Channels which have less than 1% average audience share for all households over a year.
- Type of Service:** The service providers or broadcasters will have the right to choose any one or more options from "Closed Captioning, Subtitles, Open Captioning and/or Sign Language (not only hand but facial expression also). Open captions always are in view and cannot be turned off, whereas closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer.
- Responsibility:** The creators of the content will be responsible to create the content for these services and deliver it to the concerned channels and broadcasters.

Earlier Instances to Support Hearing Impaired:

- Doordarshan has been carrying sign language interpretation of the address of President of India on the eve of Independence Day and Prime Minister's address from the ramparts of Red Fort on Independence Day every year.
- Recently, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has asked Private Satellite News TV channels also to telecast a short programme on Independence Day Celebrations, along with corresponding sign language interpretation, in the afternoon/evening of 15th August.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Whistle Blower Portal: IREDA

Recently, the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) has launched a 'whistle-blower Portal', as a part of 'Vigilance Awareness Week 2021'. It is a part of IREDA's "zero tolerance"

of corruption. Through this portal, IREDA employees can raise concerns related to fraud, corruption, abuse of power etc.

- IREDA is a Mini Ratna (Category – I) Government of India Enterprise under the administrative control of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

Key Points

Whistle blowing:

- According to the Companies Act 2013, whistleblowing is an action aimed at drawing the attention of stakeholders to instances of unethical practices in an organization.
- A whistleblower can be anyone who chooses to expose wrong practices and has evidence to support the allegations.
- They can be either from within or outside the organization, such as current and former employees, shareholders, external auditors, and lawyers.
- In India, whistleblowers are protected by the Whistleblowers Protection Act, 2014.
- In January 2020, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) came out with a new mechanism to reward whistle-blowers and other informants for sharing information about insider trading cases. Insider trading is an unfair and illegal practice in the stock market, wherein other investors are at a great disadvantage due to the lack of important insider non-public information about a company.

Vigilance Awareness Week:

About:

- It is celebrated every year in the birthday week of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, often referred to as the 'Bismark of India'. It is observed by the Central Vigilance Commission. National Unity Day or Rashtriya Ekta Diwas is celebrated on 31st October every year to mark the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. This year, Vigilance Week is being observed from 26th October to 1st November.
- **Theme:** 'Independent India @ 75: Self Reliance and Integrity'.
- **Aim:** Various activities are planned through the week, which are aimed at recognising the ills of corruption and promoting ways to combat it at an individual as well as systemic level.

Corruption in India

Prevalence:

- The Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) – Asia 2020, found that nearly 50 of those who paid bribes were asked to, while 32% of those who used personal connections said they would not receive the service otherwise.
- As of 2020, India stands at the 86th spot on the corruption perception index among a list of 180 countries. This is worse than 2019 when India stood at the 80th spot.

Causes:

- The important causes of corruption in India are poor regulatory framework, exclusivist process of decision making aggravated by discretion and official secrecy, rigid bureaucratic structures and processes; and absence of effective internal control mechanism.

Impact:

- It promotes inefficiencies in utilisation of resources, distorts the markets, compromises quality, destroys the environment and of late has become a serious threat to national security.

Initiatives Taken:

1. Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.
2. The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
3. The Companies Act, 2013.
4. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010.
5. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013
6. Central Vigilance Commission

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Critically analyse the trend of shrinking of the Informal sector in the recent years and the necessary precautions to be taken up with this new trend. (250 words)

Ans:

Introduction

India's vast majority of India's workforce is informally employed – those who work outside of formal establishments, in un-incorporated private enterprises and mostly without any social security benefit.

India's informal economy has shrunk to around 15-20 per cent of the formal GDP as against 52 per cent three years ago following the adoption of GST, enhanced digitalisation, and demonetisation, a report by the State Bank of India's (SBI)

Body

Reasons for shrinking of the informal sector

- At least Rs 13 lakh crore has come into the formal economy through various channels over the last few years, including the recent scheme on the e-Shram portal, according to SBI Ecowrap.
- Since 2016, a plethora of measures, which accelerated the digitisation of the economy and the emergence of the gig economy, have facilitated higher formalisation at rates that are possibly much faster than that of most other nations.
- Over the last couple of years, the government has made many efforts for formalisation, the report said.
- One of the sources to analyse the extent of formalisation is the monthly EPFO payroll report which provides data on establishments remitting first ECR (Electronic Challan-cum-Return) in a particular month. Based on this data it is estimated that almost 36.6 lakh jobs have been formalised till August 2021.
- According the e-Shram portal, India's first national database of unorganised workers, on which 5.7 crore workers have registered until October 30, 2021.
- Sixty-two per cent of workers are in the 18-40 age group, and 92 per cent have a monthly income of less than Rs 10,000.
- Even in agriculture, the usage of KCC cards has increased significantly and we estimate Rs 4.6 lakh crore formalisation only through KCC route, with more marginalized farmers coming under the banking sector ambit through such usage

However, this doesn't indicate a complete paradigm shift towards formalization of Indian economy

- The size of India's informal sector is massive and so is the extent of diversity therein. It accounts for about 50% of GVA and a major share in the export basket.
- Around 93 per cent of India's workforce is part of the informal economy (NSSO 2014). Although the pandemic has impacted all sectors, it has been felt more by the informal sector.
- According to experts, the extent of formalisation in the economy will depend on the way it is defined.
- It is also argued that the informal sector was not 52 per cent but around 42-44 per cent of the GDP — and while there has been a rise in formalisation, the informal sector has definitely not halved.
- In case of high levels of formalisation, the tax-to-GDP ratio would have gone up significantly. However, it has only gone up from around 16.5 per cent to 17.5 per cent.

Measures needed

- Enterprises must undergo drastic internal transformation, progressively converging at incremental formalisation through spontaneous and self-propelled transition into economically-viable units.
- Because the vision of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat exposes the informal sector to global competition, entrepreneurs must embrace the subtle art of strategic positioning in global mega-supply chains.
- To continuously employ current workforce, we need to incrementally corner an extra chunk in product market, which necessitates increased competitiveness, being led mainly but not solely by enhanced labour productivity which tends to make a part of the workforce redundant cyclically.
- To generate good quality jobs, diversification (both horizontal and vertical) must be encouraged.
- Vertical diversification entails products not just be partly produced or assembled in India, they must be the end-products of fully indigenised and integrated production and supply chains, from design to made in India.
- Horizontal diversification involves expansion into newer products and markets, smartly aligning with India's comparative advantage of surplus labour.

Conclusion

The vision of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat is an inflexion point for India's informal sector, which stipulates adroit manoeuvring between contrasting forces of continuity (persistent and pervasive informality) and change (incremental formalisation). Aatmanirbharta must embrace informality via factoring in these three transformations and nudge it towards incremental and spontaneous formalisation.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Which one of the following is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea?

- a) Golan Heights
- b) West Bank
- c) **Gaza Strip**
- d) Amman

Q2. Consider the following statements

1. Enriched uranium is a type of uranium in which the percent composition of uranium-235 has been increased through the process of isotope separation.
2. Enriched uranium is a critical component for both civil nuclear power generation and military nuclear weapons.

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

Q3. The Chhattisgarh Model was in news recently, is related to which of the following?

- a) Preventing the spread of the coronavirus
- b) Community policing
- c) **Stubble burning and pollution control**
- d) None of the above

Q4. Vanniyars are one of the largest and most consolidated backward communities in

- a) Meghalaya
- b) Rajasthan
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) **Tamil Nadu**

Q5. Consider the following statements:

1. Asiatic lion is naturally found in India only.
2. Double-humped camel is naturally found in India only.
3. One-horned rhinoceros is naturally found in India only.

Which of the statements given above is / are correct?

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