

GOVERNANCE

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana saw a spurt in new distribution just before the 2019 general election as per RTI (Right To Information) plea. The target under the scheme was to release 8 crore LPG connections to the deprived household by 2020. This was achieved in August 2019, seven months ahead of the March 2020 deadline.

In August 2021, the Prime Minister launched the second phase of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) or Ujjwala 2.0 Scheme.

Key Points

About:

- **PMUY-I:** Launched in May 2016 to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.
- **PMUY-II:** It is aimed to provide maximum benefit to the migrants who live in other states and find it difficult to submit address proof. Now they will only have to give "Self Declaration" to avail the benefit.

Objectives:

1. Empowering women and protecting their health.
2. Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
3. Preventing young children from a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning fossil fuel.

Features:

- The scheme provides a financial support of Rs 1600 for each LPG connection to the BPL households.
- Along with a deposit-free LPG connection, Ujjwala 2.0 will provide the first refill and a hotplate free of cost to the beneficiaries.

Target:

- Under Ujjwala 1.0, the target was to provide LPG connections to 50 million women from the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, by March 2020. However, in August 2018, women from seven other categories were brought under the purview of the scheme: SC/ST, those under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), beneficiaries of the Antyoday Anna Yojana (AAY), Forest Dwellers, most backward classes, tea gardens and Islands.
- Under Ujjwala 2.0, an additional 10 million LPG connections will be provided to the beneficiaries. Government has also fixed a target of providing piped gas to 21 lakh homes in 50 districts.

Nodal Ministry:

- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).

Achievements:

- In the first phase of the PMUY, 8 crore poor families, including from the Dalit and tribal communities, were given free cooking gas connections.
- The LPG infrastructure has expanded manifold in the country. In the last six years, more than 11,000 new LPG distribution centres have opened across the country.

Challenges:

- **Low Consumption of Refills:**
 1. Encouraging the sustained usage of LPG remains a big challenge, and low consumption of refills hindered recovery of outstanding loans disbursed under the scheme.
 2. The annual average refill consumption on 31st December 2018 was only 3.21.
- **System Anomalies:** There are deficiencies such as the issuance of connections to unintended beneficiaries, and problems with the software of the state-run oil marketing companies for identifying intended beneficiaries and inadequacies in the deduplication process.

Way Forward

- The scheme should be extended to poor households in urban and semi-urban slum areas.
- There is a need for achieving a higher LPG coverage of the population by providing connections to households that do not have LPG.
- Entering Aadhaar numbers of all adult family members of existing as well as new beneficiaries to make deduplication effective and appropriate measures in distributors' software to restrict issuance to ineligible beneficiaries.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**India joins G20's Troika**

Recently, India joined the G20 'Troika' and with this India has started the procedure for taking over the G20 presidency next year.

Key Points**About 'Troika':**

- It refers to the top grouping within the G20 that consists of the current, previous and the incoming presidencies — Indonesia, Italy and India.
- As a Troika member, India will work closely with Indonesia and Italy to ensure consistency and continuity of the G20's agenda.
- 1. India will assume the G20 presidency on 1st December 2022 from Indonesia, and will convene the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in India in 2023.
- 2. Italy hosted the G20 summit during October 30-31, 2021 where India had raised the issue of Afghanistan's future following the takeover by the Taliban.
- 3. Indonesia took over the G20 presidency from 1st December, 2021 and in the coming months, Indonesia will hold rounds of discussion at various levels among the members of the G20 before convening the G20 Leaders' Summit scheduled for October 30-31, 2022.
- 4. Next year's summit will be organised along the overall theme of "Recover Together, Recover Stronger".

G20:**About:**

- It is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union (EU), with representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It does not have a permanent secretariat or Headquarters.
- The membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world's population, 85% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.

Members:

- Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the EU.

Mandate of the Grouping:

- The G20 is the premier forum for international economic cooperation, which reflects a recognition that global prosperity is interdependent and the economic opportunities and challenges are interlinked.
- G20 countries have come together to better prepare for the future.
- The primary mandate of the grouping is for International Economic cooperation with particular emphasis to prevent future financial crises across the world.
- It plays a significant role in shaping the global economic agenda.
- From 1999-2008 the forum exalted from a grouping of Central bank governors and finance ministers to Heads of states.

India and G20:

- As a founding member of the G20, India has used the platform to raise issues of vital importance and those that impact on the most vulnerable around the world..
- The global economic agenda making forum is to be presided over by India in 2022, it's a challenge as well as an opportunity for India to foster its presence in the international arena.
- But due to the rising toll of unemployment rates and poverty in the domestic portion, it's hard to take the lead effectively.

AGRICULTURE**Natural Farming**

Recently, NITI Aayog has conducted a national workshop on Natural Farming. There are many working models of natural farming all over the world, the Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is the most popular model in India. This comprehensive, natural, and spiritual farming system was developed by Padma Shri Subhash Palekar.

Key Points

About:

- It can be defined as a “chemical- free farming and livestock based ”. Soundly grounded in agro-ecology, it is a diversified farming system that integrates crops, trees and livestock, allowing the optimum use of functional biodiversity.
- It holds the promise of enhancing farmers’ income while delivering many other benefits, such as restoration of soil fertility and environmental health, and mitigating and/or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This farming approach was introduced by Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese farmer and philosopher, in his 1975 book The One-Straw Revolution.
- It builds on natural or ecological processes that exist in or around farms. Internationally, Natural Farming is considered a form of regenerative agriculture—a prominent strategy to save the planet.
- It has the potential to manage land practices and sequester carbon from the atmosphere in soils and plants, where it is actually useful instead of being detrimental.
- In India, Natural farming is promoted as Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati Programme (BPKP) under Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY). BPKP is aimed at promoting traditional indigenous practices which reduce externally purchased inputs.
- Natural Farming, as the name suggests, is the art, practice and, increasingly, the science of working with nature to achieve much more with less.

Aim:

- To make farming viable and aspirational by increasing net incomes of farmers on account of cost reduction, reduced risks, similar yields, incomes from intercropping.
- To drastically cut down production costs by encouraging farmers to prepare essential biological inputs using on-farm, natural and home-grown resources.

Significance:

- **Minimized Cost Of Production:** It is considered as a cost- effective farming practice with scope for raising employment and rural development.
- **Ensures Better Health:** As Natural Farming does not use any synthetic chemicals, health risks and hazards are eliminated. The food has higher nutrition density and therefore offers better health benefits.
- **Employment Generation:** It generates employment on account of natural farming input enterprises, value addition, marketing in local areas, etc. The surplus from natural farming is invested in the village itself. As it has the potential to generate employment, thereby stemming the migration of rural youth.
- **Environment Conservation:** It ensures better soil biology, improved agrobiodiversity and a more judicious usage of water with much smaller carbon and nitrogen footprints.
- **Reduced Water Consumption:** By working with diverse crops that help each other and cover the soil to prevent unnecessary water loss through evaporation, Natural Farming optimizes the amount of ‘crop per drop’.
- **Rejuvenates Soil Health:** The most immediate impact of Natural Farming is on the biology of soil—on microbes and other living organisms such as earthworms. Soil health depends entirely on the living organisms in it.
- **Livestock Sustainability:** The integration of livestock in the farming system plays an important role in Natural farming and helps in restoring the ecosystem. Eco Friendly bio-inputs, such as Jivamrit and Beejamrit, are prepared from cow dung and urine, and other natural products.
- **Resilience:** The changes in soil structure with the help of organic carbon, no/low tillage and plant diversity are supporting plant growth even under extreme situations like severe droughts and withstanding severe flood and wind damage during cyclones. NF impacts many farmers positively by imparting resilience to the crops against weather extremities.

Related Initiatives:

- **Rainfed Area Development (RAD):** It focuses on Integrated Farming System (IFS) for enhancing productivity and minimizing risks associated with climatic variabilities.
- **Sub-mission on Agro Forestry (SMAF):** It aims to encourage farmers to plant multi-purpose trees together with the agriculture crops for climate resilience and an additional source of income to the farmers, as well as enhanced feedstock to inter alia wood-based and herbal industry.
- **National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA),** to develop, demonstrate and disseminate the techniques to make agriculture resilient to adverse impacts of climate change.

- **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER):** It is a Central Sector Scheme, a sub-mission under NMSA, aims to develop certified organic production in a value chain mode.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):** It was launched in 2015 to address the issues of water resources and provide a permanent solution that envisages Per Drop More Crop.
- **Green India Mission:** It was launched in 2014 under the umbrella of National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) with the primary objective of protecting, restoring and enhancing India's diminishing forest cover.

Differences between Natural Farming and Organic Farming

Organic Farming VS Natural Farming

- In organic farming, organic fertilizers and manures like compost, vermicompost, cow dung manure, etc. are used and added to farmlands from external sources.
- In natural farming, neither chemical nor organic fertilizers are added to the soil. In fact, no external fertilizers are added to soil or given to plants whatsoever.
- Organic farming still requires basic agro practices like plowing, tilling, mixing of manures, weeding, etc. to be performed.
- In natural farming, decomposition of organic matter by microbes and earthworms is encouraged right on the soil surface itself, which gradually adds nutrition in the soil, over the period.
- Organic farming is still expensive due to the requirement of bulk manures, and it has an ecological impact on surrounding environments; whereas, natural agriculture is an extremely low-cost farming method, completely molding with local biodiversity.
- In natural farming there is no plowing, no tilling of soil and no fertilizers, and no weeding is done just the way it would be in natural ecosystems.

Way Forward

- The world's population is predicted to expand to approximately 10 billion by 2050. It is expected that agricultural demand will increase up to 50%, in comparison to 2013, in such a situation a transformational process towards 'holistic' approaches such as agro-ecology, agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture, and conservation agriculture is a necessity.
- There is a need to Strengthen agricultural market infrastructure and extend the procurement mechanism to all foodgrain and non-foodgrain crops to all States.
- Implementation of price deficiency payment system for selected crops. There is a need to enact legislation on 'right to sell at MSP' needs immediate attention.
- MGNREGS ((Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) must also be linked with farm work in order to reduce the cost of cultivation which has escalated at a faster pace over the past few years.

PRELIMS FACT

World AIDS Day 2021

World AIDS Day is observed on 1st December every year all over the world to spread awareness about the disease and remember all those who lost their lives to it.

Key Points

About:

- It was founded in 1988 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and was the first ever global health day with a motto of raising public awareness about Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
 1. AIDS is a pandemic disease caused by the infection of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which damages the human immune system.
 2. There were an estimated 37.7 million people living with HIV at the end of 2020, over two thirds of whom (25.4 million) are in the African Region.
 3. In 2020, 680 000 people died from HIV-related causes and 1.5 million people acquired HIV.
- **Theme for 2021: 'End inequalities. End AIDS'.**
 1. With a special focus on reaching people left behind, WHO and its partners are highlighting the growing inequalities in access to essential HIV services.
 2. WHO is calling on global leaders and citizens to rally to confront the inequalities that drive AIDS and to reach people who are currently not receiving essential HIV services.

Significance:

- The very day reminds the public and government that HIV has not gone away and there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education.
- It is an opportunity to show solidarity with the millions of people living with HIV worldwide.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. The Char Dham road project presents a conflict between developmental and security considerations on one hand and environmental concerns on the other. How can all three be balanced? Analyse. (250 words).

Ans:

Introduction

The Char Dham road project, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016, is an ambitious attempt to widen nearly 900 kilometres of hill roads at the cost of Rs. 12,000 crore. The project, which will be executed by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), aims to provide all-weather connectivity to the four major shrines of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.

Body

Background

- Considering the fragile nature of Himalayas, in 2018, it was challenged by an NGO for its potential impact on the Himalayan ecology.
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) filed an appeal for a double-lane road with an even higher road width to meet the requirement of the army.
- Subsequently, Min of Road Transport and highways (MoRTH) amended its 2018 circular and raised the 5.5m width limit to 10m.
- The Supreme Court (SC), in 2020, after consultation with the high-powered committee (HPC) and on the basis of MoRTH guidelines, said that the width of the roads cannot exceed 5.5 m.

Challenges posed by developmental projects in Himalayas

- Most of the development work in the Himalayas is being carried out without an understanding of its fragility, seismicity, glacial behaviour, climatic changes and their collective destructive power.
- The flash floods due to the burst of an artificial lake created by a huge landslide (rock, frozen mud and ice) in Rishi Ganga, inside Nanda Devi Sanctuary, is the one such warning given by the Himalayas to the blind supporters of “development” in the fragile mountains.
- Similarly, the Char Dham project will significantly reinforce mass wasting processes and erosion rates given the steepness of the slopes, earthquake activity and erosivity of increased monsoonal precipitation.
- The unique Himalayan landscape with steep slopes and sharp gradients is not amenable to human engineering.
- For instance, during the monsoons, owing to the massive hill-cutting for the Char Dham road project, several landslides have occurred in the region. The recent floods in the Dhaulti Ganga, Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers claimed over 200 lives.
- As a mountain system, the Himalayas have had earthquakes, avalanches, landslides, soil erosion, forest fires and floods, and these are its natural expressions, parts of its being.
- Road and hydro projects are being operated in the Himalayas with practically no rigorous research on the ecological history of the area, cost-benefit analysis and many other aspects including displacement of communities, destruction of biodiversity, agricultural land, pastures as well as the cultural heritage of the area.

Measures needed:

- Disaster-resilient, safe and stable infrastructure is the only solution for commuting by road in the hills.
- The need of the hour is to keep the scale of human-induced disturbances to the minimum level possible.
- Industries across sectors must come together on a common platform to address the issues concerning economic development and environment protection.
- Policies need to be simplified to create an ecosystem for new sustainable businesses to flourish.
- Good environmental governance which limits exploitation of natural resources to sustainable levels.
- We need to strengthen participatory processes such as public hearings in the environmental and forest clearance process.
- Strict environmental regulation and Environmental Impact Assessment may reduce environmental damage significantly.

- Regions and countries can benefit from the knowledge of indigenous people and their understanding of large ecosystems.
- The linkage of biodiversity and environmental sustainability highlights the critical need to integrate biodiversity considerations in global decision-making.

Conclusion

Development remains the greatest pursuit as well as a challenge, faced by humanity. However, despite the unprecedented economic and social progress that has been made over the last century, poverty, famine and environmental degradation still persist on a global scale. Moreover, environmental deterioration and climate change have started to show irrevocable damages to the developmental progress made so far. Thus, development goals must be pursued without breaching environment regulations.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. In India, Laws can be repealed through

1. an ordinance
2. legislation
3. oral speech

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Q2. Nations sharing a coastline with the Persian Gulf:

1. Iraq
2. Oman
3. Kuwait
4. Iran

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- a. 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. **1, 3 and 4 only**
- c. 2, 3 and 4 only
- d. 1, 2 and 4 only

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding Operation Sankalp:

1. It was the codename for the Indian Armed Forces operation to seize control of the Galwan Valley of Ladakh.
2. It was a tri-services mission, engaging all three branches of India's armed forces.

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**

Q4. From the ecological point of view, which one of the following assumes importance in being a good link between the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats?

- a. **Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve**
- b. Nallamala Forest
- c. Nagarhole National Park
- d. Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve

Q5. Consider the following statements in respect of Trade Related Analysis of Fauna and Flora in Commerce (TRAFFIC):

1. TRAFFIC is a bureau under United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
2. The mission of TRAFFIC is to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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