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General Studies Paper – 1

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General Studies - 1

1. Vaccination of manual scavengers must be prioritised

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS-1

Synopsis: The government is focussing on the vaccination of frontline sanitation workers. However, the most vulnerable among them, Manual Scavengers, did not get the attention they deserve.

Introduction

India is far behind in terms of understanding sanitation workers and their different categories. Manual scavengers belong to the lowest strata of unprotected sanitation workers. Many people in India believe that manual scavenging is already eliminated since it is legally banned. However, **the ground reality is very different.**

- **Sanitation workers can be categorized into f**aecal sludge handlers, sewage treatment plant sanitation workers, toilet sanitation workers, public transportation site sanitation workers (railway, roads), sewer and drain sanitation workers, sanitation-waste intersection workers, etc.
- Manual Scavengers are workers discarding human excreta manually, in any form.

The risk involved in septic cleaning is the highest. One sanitation worker dies every five days. Waste recovery sanitation workers perform the work of manual scavenging as they come in regular contact with unprotected bio-medical waste, animal faeces.

Why sanitation workers should be included in priority population for vaccines?

Vaccination of sanitation workers should be prioritized due to following reasons:

- **First, several laws banning this practice are not working properly on the ground.** Sewer deaths continue to happen. Caste and economics have a role to play in the deprivation.
- **Second, the absence of a policy for the protection of the sanitation workers** resulted in the loss of many lives during the initial days of the pandemic. These cases are not even mentioned in the records of the National Commission of the Safai Karmachari (NCSK). The Safai KarmacharI Andolan (SKA) has had far better data.
- **Third, there is no social security, no accountability** in the actual expenses of the rehabilitation schemes. Even no definite provision for healthcare or pension is being provided.
- **Fourth,** the representation of sanitation workers is not involved during creation of policies for them.
- **Fifth, sanitation workers are prone to long-term diseases. In many cases, t**hey don't even live till the age of retirement. Their children suffer from malnutrition, TB, and cholera because of their habitation around the waste generated by the cities.
- **Lastly, the sanitation workers worked full time** to ensure safety for the people during the pandemic.

Way forward

The government must urgently prioritize vaccination for manual scavengers without giving the argument that they have already developed "herd immunity".

General Studies Paper - 2

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General Studies - 2

1. 15th Finance commission: Reforming financial governance of India's municipalities
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 2- Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges therein**.**
Synopsis: The reforms suggested by the 15th Finance commissions (interim report) can improve the financial governance of India's municipalities.

Background:

- The 15th Finance Commission submitted an interim report for FY 2020-21.
- Now, the final report for **FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26** is expected to be tabled along with the forthcoming Budget 2021-22.
- The Interim report for 2020-21 talks about raising the standards of **financial governance** of India's municipalities in four specific ways.
- Implementation of the suggested 4 changes can be **a watershed moment** in the **financial governance reforms of India's municipalities.**

What are the four changes suggested by the 15th Finance commission?
The 15th Finance commission in its interim report has suggested the following changes to bring reforms to the financial governance of India's municipalities.

1. **First, increasing the overall financial disbursement for municipalities** (including panchayats) from the existing 30 per cent to 40 percent, in phases. This will result in increased financial resource for the municipalities over the five years.
2. **Second**, it has set **two very important conditions** for all municipalities, for receiving grants. **First,** Publication of audited annual accounts. **Second,** notification of floor rates for property tax. It will result in financial accountability and increased revenue of municipalities.
    - Moreover, an Additional **borrowing limit** has been set for states (Rs 50,000 crore). It is linked to reforms in **property taxes** and user charges for water and sanitation.
3. Third, **100 percent outcome-based funding** to 50 million-plus **urban agglomerations** (excluding Union Territories). Conditions emphasize specifically air quality, water supply, and sanitation.
    - Note: India has **4,500 municipalities** out of which approx. 250 municipalities are urban agglomerations with 53 million-plus population. It contains 44 per cent of the total urban population.
    - Whereas, the remaining 4,250-plus municipalities comprise 56 per cent of the total urban population.
4. Fourth, it has recommended a **common digital platform for municipal accounts**. This will give a consolidated view of municipal finances and sectoral outlays at the state level.

What are the suggestions?
Constitutional bodies like the finance commission can only prepare the grounds of reforms. The ultimate responsibility **for municipal finance reforms** remains with the state governments. Thus, State governments need to enact municipal legislation towards following 5 Objectives:

1. Fiscal decentralisation by strengthening **state finance commissions**.
2. **Revenue optimisation** to enhance their own revenues.
3. Fiscal responsibility and budget management to accelerate municipal borrowings.

4. Strengthening **institutional capacities** by an adequately skilled workforce.
5. Facilitate **transparency and citizen participation** for democratic accountability.
   - Also, State governments need to shift from the present **discretionary grants** practice to **predictable fiscal transfers** to municipalities.

2. India- Myanmar relations after Coup

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS – 2- India and its neighborhood- relations

Synopsis: India has a deep security relationship with the India Myanmar military. It is not in India's interest to intervene in Myanmar's politics.

Introduction

Military rule has returned to Myanmar after a coup. Aung San Suu Kyi along with other political leaders have been detained by the Military.

Similar events had taken place in Myanmar 30 years ago. But this time, India's reaction is going to be very different from its stand in 1989-90.

Why is India's reaction going to be different this time?

India gave a statement of deep concern over the developments in Myanmar. However, its reaction is going to be different from the past because of the following reasons:

- **First, India has a very close security relationship with the Myanmar military**. Myanmar military assists India in securing the North East borders from insurgent groups.
  - In a recent visit to Myanmar, Indian counterparts met with both State Councillor Suu Kyi and Gen. Min Aung Hlaing. It signifies the equal importance of both for India.
- **Second,** The **image of Ms. Suu Kyi as a democratic icon** and Nobel peace laureate has been damaged. It is the result of her failure in stopping the Army's pogrom against Rohingya. Moreover, she defended the Army's action.
- **Third, India has initiated numerous infrastructure and development projects** with Myanmar. India sees this as the "**Gateway to the East**" and ASEAN countries. For example, the India- Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport network.
- **Fourth**, **India wants to resolve the issue of Rohingya refugees** that fled to Bangladesh and some of them still live in India.
- **Fifth,** There was a **public uproar in India, in 1990, to take a strong stand against Myanmar.** This is not the case in the present scenario.

Till now, India enjoyed a balanced relationship with both civil and military establishments of Myanmar. But after this coup, India's capacity to maintain a balanced relationship on both sides has diminished.

3. Budget 2021: Continues with fiscal conservatism

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2-Parliament and State Legislatures- Budgeting

Synopsis: A close analysis of Budget 2021 reveals that the Government is following the principle of fiscal conservatism. The policy of Fiscal spending was the need of the hour.

Why the government resorts to fiscal conservatism?

Falling revenues had forced the government to restrict its aggregate spending. Some of the issues that contributed to falling revenues are,

- A sharp reduction in corporate tax rates in September 2019,
- The under-performance of Goods and Services Tax regime.

- Failure of government's ambitious disinvestment agenda. The government was only able to collect ₹32,000 crores last year, compared to the plan of ₹2.1-lakh crore.
- The mandate of **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act** to reduce **the fiscal deficit.**

Because of the above reasons the total expenditure for 2021-22 is projected to rise only by just 0.95% compared to revised estimates for 2020-21.

What are the signs of a continuation of Fiscal conservatism in Budget 2021?

1. **First, Allocation to MGNREGA and Food subsidies:**
   - According to the Budget 2021-22, the allocations for the **MGNREGA programme**, is drastically reduced from the ₹1,11,500 crore spent in 2020-21 to ₹73,300 crores in 2021-22.
   - Similarly, the allocation for food subsidies has been reduced from ₹4,22,618 crore in 2020-21 to ₹2,42,836 crore in 2021-22.
   - MGNREGA and food subsidies supported the vulnerable sections in a big way, to survive during lockdowns.
   - Experts see this as neglect of responsibilities by the government to **support the vulnerable and marginalized people.**

2. Second, Allocation to health and wellbeing

As per the Budget, the government has increased its spending on health and **capital expenditure**.

- Health spending increased by 137% compared to the previous year. (From ₹94,452 crore in 2020-21 to ₹2,23,846 crore in 2021-22)

However, closer scrutiny of budget allocations for health suggests otherwise. For example,

- The expenditure on the **Jal Jeevan Mission** is included as a part of '**Health and Wellbeing' expenditure**. It has magnified the figures on Health expenditure.
- Also, an increase in Budget spending on Health is not reflected equally in the allocation for the **Department of Health and Family Welfare**. For example, the Budget estimate of Department of Health and Family Welfare for 2021, shows a mere increase of 9.6% compared to last year.

3. Third, the allocation for infrastructure investment

As per the budget, Capital spending is increased by 35% compared to the previous year. (from ₹4.12-lakh crore in 2020-21 to ₹5.54-lakh crore in 2021-22)

But the Budget estimate for infrastructure will also not be adequate. Because of the following reasons,

- The government is planning to finance new investments in infrastructure through **disinvestments of equity, strategic sale, and privatization** of the public financial sector. It is expected to yield ₹1.75-lakh crore in 2021-22.
- However, after looking at the past performance of disinvestment targets, it seems to be an overambitious target.

Even before the pandemic recedes, the government seems to restore the old normal. i.e., **Fiscal Conservatism. It is still continuing with the same path.**

4. Evaluation of Budget 2021

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2-Parliament and State Legislatures- Budgeting

Synopsis: The evaluation of Budget 2021 is done on three parameters. First, on the credibility of the Budget. Second, it's potential to deliver adequate domestic output and jobs. Third, on how the Budget raises resources.

What is the Credibility of the Budget 2021?

- Budget 2021 scores high on credibility. Because, unlike previous budgets, Budget 2021 has taken into account the real estimates of **revenue receipts. Moreover, it** has recognized the '**off balance sheet' expenditures**.
- This has resulted in arriving at **real fiscal deficit numbers** that are much higher than expected. It is 9.5% of the GDP for FY21 and 6.8% of the GDP for FY22. But disclosing real fiscal deficit has the following significance
  1. One, realistic revenue budgets will reduce the pressure on tax authorities to engage in tax terrorism.
  2. Two, it will allow governments to release payments and refunds on time.
  3. Three, focus on the 'real' numbers will help in informed decision-making and planning to improve our fiscal balance.

Steps taken to provide adequate domestic output and jobs

1. Budget 2021 signals a shift away from the **revenue expenditure towards Capital Expenditure**. **Capital expenditure** in FY22 is budgeted to increase by 26% over FY21 due to increased focus on areas such as infrastructure, roads, and textile parks.
2. The budget also promises to improve health, education, nutrition and urban infrastructure.
3. Along with this, efforts are being made to increase domestic jobs. It includes **reform of labour laws**, **corporate tax rate cuts, and production-linked incentive**s.

What steps were taken to raise resources and improve investment?

- The Budget focuses to raise resources through **disinvestment and asset sales**, rather than via additional taxes. It reduces the tax burden on people.
- The Finance Minister also announced the creation of **a new Development Financial Institution** to facilitate and fund infrastructure investments.
- There were also efforts to revive our stressed financial services ecosystem. The Finance Minister announced the creation of a **government Asset Reconstruction Company, or 'bad bank'**, to reduce the non-performing assets throughout the industry.

Way forward

- The government should also help to revive other sectors that are suffering from **chronic stress**. Examples are financial services, power, real estate, telecom, airlines and shipping, contact-based services, and micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Also, taking lessons from the **global financial crisis 2008**, the government should not assume that a revival in consumption and government spending would automatically result in durable growth. Hence, Government needs to make efforts to ensure adequate growth in domestic output and jobs.

5. Coup in Myanmar: Derailment of Democracy

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Syllabus: Gs 2-India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: Coup in Myanmar is an outcome of many unresolved differences between the democratically elected government and the army. It has many consequences.

Background

1. Myanmar is a partially democratic country. The democratic government led by **Aung San Suu Kyi** shared half of its power with Myanmar's Military.
2. On February 1, the Myanmar army captured power by declaring an emergency.

3. The military justified its action by citing the reason that there was "terrible fraud in the voter list" in the recently held Parliamentary election. Since the Election Commission failed to settle the matter, the army declared an emergency.
4. Similar incidents of overtaking the democratic government by forcing military rule has taken place in 1962, 1988 and 1990.

Is it a military coup or an Emergency?

The following arguments prove that the incident that took place on Feb 1 is a military coup and not an emergency.

- First, electoral issues needed to be addressed and resolved by relevant authorities, not by the military leadership.
- Second, Myanmar Constitution empowers the President to proclaim an emergency, in consultation with the National Defence and Security Council. However, neither the Council met nor the Presidential consent was obtained.

What were the reasons behind this Coup?

Many unresolved differences between the democratic government and Myanmar's army, led to this coup.

- **First, Ideological differences**:
  - The army feels that it's power should not be undermined. As it is the one that secured independence, defended the country against secession, and ensured stability and development.
  - Whereas the government has been a strong supporter of democracy. In this system, the army should be completely apolitical.
- **Second, Differences over different socio-politico- economic issues.** For example, differences over ethnic reconciliation, constitutional reform, the Rohingya issue, and the China policy.
- **Third, Fight for power:**
  - Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was willing to become Myanmar's President. He was also about to retire in July.
  - However, Ms. Suu Kyi was opposed to it, and she did not want to extend his tenure. Presumably, the coup guarantees an indefinite extension of tenure. It will also help him to retain the Power in his hands.
- **Fourth, Role of China:** The Chinese Communist Party shares a very close association with the Myanmar army for decades. The increasing popularity of the Democratic government over Myanmar army would have been detrimental to Chinese interest in Myanmar.

What are the Consequences?

Impact on Rohingya's:

- **Rohingya's** are a Predominantly Muslim population who are facing **Ethnic violence** in Myanmar.
- Currently, a million of them are living in Bangladesh as **refugees** due to persecution in Myanmar, and are waiting to be repatriated.
- Though the Myanmar army was against **repatriation**, recently the democratic government of Myanmar and Bangladesh held talks for repatriation. These efforts, will definitely be impacted by the current coup.

Impact on Democracy:

- With great efforts the Suu Kyi's administration has nurtured the growth of democracy even in the deeper roots of Myanmar. Now the coup is a step back for Myanmar's democracy.

Way forward for India

Though India is a torch-bearer of democracy, the government is also committed to the policy of **non-interference** in another state's internal affairs. Therefore, India should cautiously balance its principles, values, interests while dealing with Myanmar based on **geopolitical realities and national interest.**

6. Sri Lanka Writes Off Strategic Colombo Port Deal With India & Japan

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS 2- India and its neighborhood- relations

Synopsis: Sri Lanka's has pulled out of a 2019 Colombo Port deal with India and Japan. The agreement was for developing the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Introduction

India and Sri Lanka signed a Memorandum of Understanding(MoU) for cooperation on economic projects in 2019. **A container terminal at the Colombo Port was one of the projects under MoU**.

However, Sri Lanka has pulled out from the deal after opposition from trade unions.

What was the agreement?

- The ECT deal was important as between **60 and 70 percent of transshipment that takes place through it is India-linked.**
- As per the agreement, India and Japan would have 49 percent ownership of the ECT, Whereas **Sri Lanka would have 51% stake.**
- A 40-year loan at an interest rate of 0.1% from Japan was expected to fund the development of the ECT.

What went wrong?

1. India-Sri Lanka relations are cordial in general. But India's involvement in the civil wars of Sri Lanka still affects India's interest there.
2. Colombo Port Trade Union has strongly opposed the 49% stake of India and Japan. They are demanding 100% ownership of Sri Lanka of the ports.
3. Big projects by India have always faced opposition in Sri Lanka. Due to this, India brought Japan in at least two of the projects listed in the MoU.
4. **But the relationship between Japan and Sri Lanka has also changed over the years,** because of Colombo's closeness to China. Therefore, including Japan in the project didn't prove to be fruitful.
5. The protests ended after the announcement of the Sri Lanka government. Now, the ECT would be developed and operated as a "wholly-owned container terminal of the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA).

What happens now?

India has asked **Colombo not to take a unilateral decision on an existing tripartite agreement.** Japan has called the **decision regrettable.**

As a compensation offer, Sri Lanka has given a **proposal to India and Japan for the development of the west terminal in partnership.**

- Sri Lanka assures that the West terminal is **commercially better than the east terminal**. The developers could hold up to **85 percent stake instead of 49 percent stake** in the West terminal.
- **The unions agreed to this proposal** to invite India and Japan to participate in the development and operation of the west terminal.
- However, India has not yet responded to the offer.

7. Protest in India and US: Similarities and differences

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Indian Constitution-Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Synopsis: The violence that took place in the US and India has some similarities. It highlights the erosion of democratic values in the world's oldest (US) and largest democracies (India).

Background

- Recently, In the US, a violent mob attacked **the U.S. Capitol building. This mob** vandalized public property and threatened lawmakers in Congress.
- Similarly, India witnessed violence on **Republic Day**. A rally planned to protest against **three farm laws**, broke off from the planned parade. Protesters entered the premises of the **Red Fort** by breaking the gates. It later led to a Police crackdown.
- These two episodes witnessed in the **world's oldest (US) and largest democracies (India) have few** similarities and differences.

What are the similarities between the two mas rallies?

First, in both countries, the aggrieved parties challenged the political developments.

In America,

- Following the victory of **Joe Biden** in the 2020 **presidential election**, Mr. Trump raised questions on the electoral process. It was despite having no proof for that.
- He even spread misinformation on **social media.** This led to the incitement of violence in the US.

In India,

- The anger was against the three laws passed by the Parliament to reform the **mandi system**. It was felt that the farm laws can endanger the **minimum support price system** that has been the economic backbone of small-scale farmers.
- The farmers protested peacefully for months baring the cold winter. Yet, the **lack of political will** to negotiate with the protesting farmers triggered the violence on Republic day.

Second, social media played an important role to show the darker side of mass rallies, in both examples.

In America,

- Social media telecasted an invading mob holding zip ties (zip ties imply a threat to the lives of lawmakers in the building).
- A truck filled with guns and bombs near the site of the attack that was discovered by law enforcement agencies was also telecasted.

In India,

- Social media was flooded with images of the religious flag of the Sikhs **(Nishan Sahib)** being hoisted at the Red Fort. This gave an impression that the protest was politically motivated.

What are the differences?

US mass rally was in support of Trump's call for nativist populism and racist ethos i.e. in support of white supremacy. It created a sharp division among the US population and will have long-term impacts.

Whereas the farmer's protest in India is against the law enacted by a powerful government. They are resisting the neoliberal economic policy of the government.

Issues with democratic models of Polity

- The above incidents clearly give a picture that Democracy is a contested topic in the world. It favours a religious or social majority through democratic processes like elections.
- Moreover, democracies are inherently capable of turning into a power structure that overtakes democratic processes. It is evident in the rise of fascism in the pre-World War Europe.
- The ongoing events in the US and India clearly explain that Democracy has been wrongly understood as the rule of the majority leading to the undermining of Democracy.

8. Vaccine battle among countries

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS 2 – Health related issues

Synopsis: Countries should refrain from engaging in vaccine battles and focus on global cooperation.

Introduction

Almost all countries across the globe are in need of access to vaccines. But the developed countries are mindlessly collecting approved vaccines.

Only the countries in the global south like China and India are helping out other countries.

How are rich countries engaging in vaccine battles?

As per few reports, the advance purchase contracts made by some countries for potential vaccine procurement are way above their need. It would **vaccinate their population many times.**

- **For example**, the EU population can be vaccinated two times, the US and the UK four times, and Canada six times.
- 82% of Pfizer's production in 2021 and 78% of Moderna's have already been **advance purchased by leading countries.**

Advanced countries are engaged in **vaccine battles as they believe that an early vaccination will bring back normalcy in their countries. Concepts of** Public good and global cooperation are missing from the scene.

What is India's stance?

On the other hand, India is exporting a **major percentage of the approved doses.** Its initial shipment to the least developed countries will be free of cost.

Exports from India are helping other nations, especially its neighbouring countries**.** For example, Brazil has received 2 million doses of vaccine from India.

India's approach needs **coordinated international efforts to bring COVID-19 under control.**

Solutions

The COVAX project is a program based on funding from high and middle-income countries. It is a global risk-sharing mechanism of **fair distribution** of COVID-19 vaccines.

This project aimed to deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021. But it is facing challenges from rich countries due to their excessive vaccine procurement, directly from suppliers.

But now, as the U.S. President **Joe Biden has decided to join the COVAX project**, expectations from the project are high. India, which is a hub of cost-effective vaccines, would be instrumental in its success. **For example**, Covishield, the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine produced in India costs only $3 per dose; Covaxin is priced at $4.2.

Way forward

The development of vaccines should have shown global cooperation between the North and the South. But the democratic world is suffering from increasing nationalist tendencies.

9. Lessons from the past for the future of Myanmar

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2-Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Synopsis: The international community needs to plan according to the ground realities of Myanmar before making any effort to restore Democracy.

Background:

- Following the recent **military coup** in Myanmar, many countries have voiced their concern to restore the Democracy in Myanmar.
- However, it is important to understand the present situation from experiences. It will save the efforts of the international community to restore **democracy, from failing.**

What are the Lessons from past Military coups of Myanmar?

First, the Myanmar military lacks any apathy towards its civilians. It is evident from past examples. For instance, during the 2008, **Cyclone Nargis disaster,** it refused to allow **foreign aid** from other countries to support relief works.

- Moreover, instead of **Prioritizing the Disaster relief work,** it announced a pre-scheduled **referendum** on the military-scripted constitution to make use of the situation.

Second, imposing **Economic sanctions** against Myanmar will not bring any major **political change.** It will do more harm to Myanmar's Poor people**.** For example, during the western sanctions before 2010, the military was able to economically withstand sanctions by striking deals with Asian countries.

Third, the Military has been emboldened by the absence of punishment for **crimes against humanity**. **For example,** ex-Myanmar military general Than Shwe was able to escape without punishment. He was on the watch list of the international community for perpetuating a crime of human rights abuses during his rule from 1992 to 2011. Brutality against **Rohingyas is also an example**.

Fourth, Myanmar's military will try to exploit the ethnic and religious divide among its citizen. So**, engagement of the international community** with domestic stakeholders, including **ethnic minorities**, especially from the north is highly critical.

Suggestions

- The international community has to make use of China's multi-layered influence on Myanmar. China has been working on Myanmar-related issues since 2013.
- Before 2015, many mechanisms were planned by Western and Asian countries for coordinating strategies on Myanmar. These initiatives were discontinued after the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. International communities need to revive and bring this mechanism under a common platform.
- International communities should make efforts to punish those individuals responsible for committing **crimes against humanity.**

10. U.S foreign policy: The road ahead

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2- Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Synopsis: Evaluation and analysis on Impact of Mr. Biden's foreign policy on various regional blocs**.**

Background

- President Biden is an idealistic, supporter of multilateralism and is deeply committed to democratic values and principles.
- He is taking a series of policy decisions to restore the prestige of America's democracy.
- However, President Biden needs to plan a lot more as the global environment today is very different from the erstwhile Obama-era.
- He needs to give a fresh look at many contentious foreign policy issues.

What are the contentious foreign policy issues under Biden administration?

Relations with China:

- Rising China poses a diplomatic, economic and technological threat to the U.S. Hence old school strategies such as **inclusive security architecture** in Asia would not be productive.
- Also, given the current situation, few countries in Asia are willing to oppose China. In this context, Biden administration needs to rethink whether the U.S. should persist with confrontation or attempt conciliation.

Relations with Russia:

- Strategic ties between Russia and China is growing. It has widened the gap between the two countries (the U.S. and Russia).
- Further, considering the Russia's growing interest in Eurasia, the U.S. need to come up with new policy directives to balance their interests.

Relations with Europe:

- Europe was once a close ally of U.S. but not anymore. They have started pursuing their Strategic autonomy. Germany has risen as Europe's new Power centre. It dictates Europe's relations with countries such as China and Russia. For example, Germany, despite U.S objection wants to go ahead with **Nord Stream 2**, the Russia-led gas pipeline project.
- The **EU-China Comprehensive Agreement** on Investment, despite the U.S.'s objections, is another indication of Europe's new independent thinking.
- Hence it would be a tough task of repairing America's ties with Europe.

Relations with West Asia:

The U.S under Mr. Biden administration has to tackle variety of problems while dealing with West Asia. Such as,

- The U.S.'s efforts to find a political settlement to end the civil wars in Syria and Yemen.
- Dealing with Saudi Arabia that is on a Biden 'watch-list', adds to the complexity of dealing with West Asia.
- Another larger problem is finding a solution to deal with the Iran nuclear problem.
    - The '**Abraham Accord'** between US, UAE and Israel, signed during the last days of the Trump Administration. It has further complicated the situation for the coming Biden government.
    - Returning to the **JCPOA, or the Iran nuclear deal** framework, may not be a realistic option after signing 'Abraham Accords'.

How Mr. Biden's Policy will Impact India?

1. Biden's administration could have both positive and negative impacts on India-U. S bilateral relation.
2. T**he India-U.S. strategic partnership, defence and security cooperation** between India and the U.S. are likely to be further stepped up. Also, **Regional security cooperation** will be further enhanced.
3. However, considering Mr. Biden's strong commitment to human rights, he will be far less supportive of India on several issues. Example: Kashmir issue, treatment of NGOs.
4. A more concerning issue for India is that under Mr. Biden, countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are likely to play a more critical role than India in achieving **security in the Indo-Pacific.**
5. Another upset for India will be Mr. Biden's **Afghanistan policy.** There is only little room for India under U.S **Afghanistan policy if** Pakistan is playing the role of mediator for the new arrangement.
6. This will have two major impacts on India.
    - One, India's efforts of the past two decades to restore democracy in Afghanistan would not be recognized.
    - Second, Pakistan would also gain a degree of legitimacy that will encourage it to carry out terror strikes on India with greater impunity.

11. Urban Mass transport needs policy reform

Source- Down To Earth

Syllabus: GS 2-Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges therein.

Synopsis: The Budget allocation for improving Urban Mass transport is welcome. Yet much is needed to be done to achieve inclusive **urbanisation.**

Background:

- In the recent budget, Finance Minister announced fund allocation for improving the Urban mass transport system.
- A sufficient amount has been allocated for the Kochi, Chennai, and Bengaluru Metro projects.
- Budget allocation for the Metro projects in the three cities is commendable. It provides greater certainty for these cities to meet their targets.
- However, the budget allocation for improving bus transport will not be adequate.
- The budget allocation for expanding the bus transport system is (₹18,000 crore) under the PPP model.

Issues in the Budget proposal for Bus Transport system?

- India's ratio of buses to population is a low- **1.2 (per 1,000 people)** compared to 8.6 in Thailand and 6.5 in South Africa. Some states like Karnataka are exceptions with the above national ratio.
- Moreover, Private bus service is a politically sensitive matter in some states with government monopolies in bus services.

What further needs to be done to improve Public transport in Urban India?

The challenge of urbanization needs multiple interventions apart from supplying grants to metro and bus system.

1. **First,** State governments control the Urban development instead of city administrations. They have failed to operationalize the nodal authorities to regulate transport.

2. **Second, Common mobility cards** are still in pilot mode. It would help citizens, use bus, train, and feeder networks seamlessly.
3. **Third,** Metro and bus services are expensive compared to the per kilometer cost of a two-wheeler.
4. **Fourth**, Census 2011 identified no. of **Census towns.** But Urban local bodies are not yet established here. They lack access to funding, infrastructure, and capacity to meet the needs of large populations. Hence, the **Recognition of census towns as urban bodies** will provide the flow of necessary funds to these growing urban conglomerations.

Way forward

In this context, the Centre should start working with State governments to integrate key areas with its transport vision. Such as affordable **inner-city housing**, access to civic services and health care, and enhanced sustainability, greenery, and walkability. Only integration can bring about **inclusive urbanisation.**

12. Sri Lanka has pushed India and Japan out from the Colombo Terminal Project

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus – GS 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis – Sri Lankan government has been forced to revoke a 2019 deal with India and Japan. The deal was to build the East Container Terminal (ECT) at Colombo Port. They cancelled the deal after facing intense resistance from trade unions across the region.

Background-

- Sri Lanka, Japan and India signed an agreement [MoC] to jointly develop the East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port in 2019.
- The MoC stated that the Sri Lanka will own 51 per cent stake. India and Japan will jointly own the remaining 49 per cent.
- However, Sri Lanka unilaterally made a decision on an existing tripartite agreement.

Significance of the ECT Project for India –

- **First,** the involvement of India and Japan is being seen as a big development. It was also seen as a **counter to the growing influence of China.**
- **Second, Important trading link-** The Colombo Port is an important port for trans-shipment of goods coming to India.
- **Third,** it is seen as a collaboration between two Indo-Pacific partners [India-Japan]. It could prove to be better funding and development in the South Asia region.

What made Sri Lanka break the tripartite agreement on ECT project?

- **First, pressure from Colombo port trade unions –**The government of Sri Lanka was under intense pressure. Because the trade unions opposed port's privatization and demanded cancellation of the 2019 agreement.
- **Second, China's involvement –** there were reports the Chinese had played a role in inducing port unions to protest against India's interest.

However, Sri Lanka has approved another proposal to develop the **West Container Terminal [WCT] of the Colombo port** with Japan and India. India has not commented on the proposal.

Way forward-

- The Sri Lankan government should be cautious that no international government or financial institution would like to make major investments if they cancel the deal due to pressure.

13. Internet shutdowns in India: impacts and way forward

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2-Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation**.**

Synopsis: Frequent internet shutdown by the state government has many negative consequences. Governments must find alternatives to balance civil liberties and security.

Background:

1. The Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017 under the **Indian Telegraph Act** contains the procedure to restrict internet access.
2. The Rules empowers the central and state governments to suspend internet services during **public emergencies or for protecting public interest.**
3. However, this provision has been frequently used in India. In the past 4 years, India has witnessed more than **400 internet shutdowns** throughout the country, which is the highest compared to any democracy in the world.
4. For instance, after the **abrogation of Article 370**, J&K witnessed the longest Internet shutdown across the world.
5. Most recently, Internet services were shut down in Delhi NCR following the violence that erupted during the **Farmers protes**t on Republic day.
6. Many civil society organizations including UN rights groups have termed these shutdowns a form of **collective punishment** for people, and an overreach of governments on citizens' **rights and liberties.**

What are the views of the Supreme court in this regard?

- In January 2020, the Supreme Court has declared that the **right to access the Internet** is one of the fundamental rights.
- It is a part of Article **19 of the Constitution** along with the freedom to carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of the Internet.

What are the negative impacts of Internet shutdown?

Arbitrary internet shutdowns have many undetermined consequences. Particularly during the crisis of the pandemic.

1. **First,** Lack of internet connectivity or **digital illiteracy** will force many citizens to be excluded from social and economic systems.
2. **Second,** Blanket bans on digital connectivity during the COVID-19 crisis will widen **digital inequalities**.
3. **Third,** It will cut off the most vulnerable i.e. the elderly, and pregnant women, from accessing vital digital health services, health and welfare alerts.
4. **Fourth,** It denies **access to learning for students** as now most of the classes are online to maintain physical distancing norms.
5. **Fifth,** Internet shutdown will cause large-scale disruptions in the economy. Many white-collar employment sectors, including IT, financial and consulting services, have resorted to **work from home option.** For example, according to an estimation India has lost over ₹20,000 crore in 2020 because of Internet shutdowns.

What is the Way forward?

- Internet bans should be used as a **last resort** and must be enforced following well-formulated protocols.
- **Emergency response and relief systems** for the vulnerable should be planned in advance before enforcing internet shutdowns.

- Other alternatives should be used. Cyber divisions of law enforcement agencies can be upgraded to use new-age innovations such as **mass surveillance systems and communication interceptors**.
- The government should focus on **balancing civil liberties with security concerns.** For that modern, independent institutions having expertise in this domain can be created.

14. Why India-EU trade pact is still difficult to achieve?

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The EU is in a turbulent situation currently due to COVID-19, Brexit, and international tensions with the US. This has unsettled the EU and worsened internal issues.

Introduction

India is planning to start negotiations on investment and trade agreements with the European Union (EU).

- However, **these discussions might face the same problems** as faced during 2007 discussions on free trade agreements.
- The EU was one of India's major trade and investment partners before COVID-19 and Brexit. But it is facing many internal issues at present. To revive its relations with the EU, India need to recalibrate its policies.

What are the issues EU facing at present?

First, Euroscepticism is impacting the unity of the EU. After the UK, many other EU member countries are resisting the EU Policies. Unity is lacking on issues such as-Eurozone, migration crises, secularism, and implementing COVID-19 lockdowns. There is no consensus upon the strategy for dealing with China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

Second, EU countries are facing many Internal issues. For the first time in 40 years, Netherlands faced Pandemic led riots.

Third, deteriorated relations with the US. During the Trump regime in the US, the EU-US relations took a downfall. Now many EU countries are looking for greater self-reliance in security. However, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and others are uncomfortable with the prospect of building larger military capabilities.

The EU is trying to avoid involving in the US-China conflict. **It has signed** the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment which was decided after negligible consultation with Washington.

Fourth, Vaccine nationalism is widening the divide. **The COVID-19 introduced divisive vaccine nationalism into the Union**. Germany and France restricted exports of personal protective equipment.

The German government had negotiated a separate vaccine contract with Pfizer in September last year. On the other hand, it is a strong advocate of European solidarity.

However, the EU's procurement program for the union from Astra-Zeneca, Moderna and Pfizer, has filled the gaps to an extent on this part.

Conclusion

- The EU will require enormous political will and clever skill to resolve these innumerable and diverse problems without further widening the existing gaps. Trade agreements with India will be the least of its problems.

15. Why RBI kept interest rates Unchanged?

Source- **The Hindu**

Syllabus- GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
Synopsis- Monetary Policy Committee [MPC] has kept the benchmark interest rates unchanged. It is proceeding with an accommodative stance of monetary policy.
Introduction

- MPC is keeping the rates unchanged to sustain the present economic growth.
- There are many factors that are providing space to MPC for keeping an accommodative stance of monetary policy.

What are the factors behind not changing the policy rates?

- **First,** retail inflation has been reduced in December, below the RBI's upper tolerance threshold of 6%.
- **Second,** while the economy is on the path of revival, it still needs support from every angle.
- **Third,** the COVID-19 vaccine and budget proposal for infrastructure are boosting confidence in the economy.

What are the concerns for growth and inflation dynamics?

- **Farmer's agitation-** The agitation involves farmers from key crop-growing States including Punjab, Haryana, and U.P. is a cause for concern. Prolong agitation has the potential to disrupt farm output.
- The Centre alone borrows 12-lakh crore at the gross level in the coming financial year, the debt manager faces the difficult task.

Steps taken by the Central Bank as the government's debt manager –

- The **enhanced held-to-maturity (HTM) limit** for banks was extended till March 31, 2023. The facility would be provided to the banks buying debt issued by the Centre and States.
- **Allowing retail investors to buy G-Secs** [government securities] directly through the Reserve Bank [Retail Direct].

Way forward-

- The vaccine campaign would boost the economic turnaround, the budget proposals and expenditure plans have raised hopes for a more robust recovery.
- The RBI needs to keep its focus over inflation as the interest rates are too low. It may boost the consumption in the near future.

16. India's strategy for Myanmar

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: GS 2- India and its Neighborhood- Relations.
Synopsis: India's Policy towards Myanmar should be a balance of India's interest and India's norms.
Background

- The recent military coup in Myanmar has once again created uncertainty regarding the future of Myanmar's democracy.
- The U. S and the west have reacted strongly. The US threatened Myanmar about sanctions.
- Myanmar lies between two powerful states (India and China) competing for power and influence. Thus, Myanmar will always have geopolitical importance.
- Given the high stakes in Myanmar, India needs to craft well-thought-out strategic choices regarding the situation.

What are the issues that countries are facing in supporting Aung San Suu Kyi?

- The image of Aung San Suu Kyi declined globally due to her support towards the ill-treatment of Rohingyas. Yet, there is no other alternative for international communities other than Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar.
- The increasing global support for Aung San Suu Kyi will diminish the possibilities for justice to the Rohingyas in the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

How the coup will impact China?

The coup in Myanmar was more in the interest of the armed forces of Myanmar. However, it might affect China both negatively and positively.

- In the short run, the Coup is against the **Economic interests** of other countries including India and China. Also, for China, the coup has destabilised its larger regional economic plans in Myanmar.
- However, in the **long run**, Myanmar will be forced to seek China's support if, the US imposes **economic sanctions** on Myanmar.
- It is likely that China will be ready to offer them support in return for increasing the Chinese footprint in the country. This will make China the biggest beneficiary of the recent Military Coup in Myanmar.

What is the dilemma faced by India?

Till now, the existence of dual power centers in Myanmar suited India's interest very well. However, the coup has put India in a dilemma on how to respond to the military coup in Myanmar.

1. Myanmar's military has been instrumental in controlling the **insurgent groups** in India's northeast. They provided India with coordinated action and intelligence sharing.
2. The issue of **Rohingya Muslims** is equally important. The military rule in Myanmar will offer support for increasing prosecution for Rohingyas. This could potentially lead to **a rise of extremism** within the community. This will be definitely against India's interests in the longer run.
3. If India's national interest is given priority then, India would cooperate with Myanmar's military. However, open support for the Military by India will lead to strong criticism by the West and especially America.
4. On the other hand, India cannot actively oppose Myanmar's military. Because Suu Kyi has also supported strong ties with China. It was Myanmar's military that has been more supportive of India.

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs has voiced its opinion for upholding the rule **of law** and the **democratic process** in Myanmar. However, considering the regional **geopolitics** India's Myanmar policy will be based on interests rather than norms.

What is the way forward?

- India must strive to push for **political reconciliation** in the country while maintaining relations with the government in power in Myanmar.
- In the meantime, India needs to focus on improving trade, connectivity, and security links between the two sides.

Read more about India-Myanmar relations

17. The need of explicit details of the offences against the children in POCSO Act

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus – GS 2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Synopsis: The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was enacted specially to protect children from sexual assault.

Background

- In the case of **Satish Ragde v. State of Maharashtra, Bombay High Court** acquitted the accused under the POCSO Act.
- The Court held that the accused groped the victim over her clothes and there was no skin to skin contact i.e. physical contact with the victim.
- The Supreme Court ordered a stay on the acquittal of the accused.

Why the legislature enacted the POCSO Act?

- **First,** to protect children below 18 years of age from any kind of sexual abuses.
- **Second,** before the enactment of this Act, there was no other Act which protect children specifically from any kind of sexual offences.
- **Third, India** has signed **the UN Convention** on the Rights of the Child in 1992. The Convention requires sexual exploitation and sexual abuse to be addressed as heinous crimes.
- **Fourth,** to provide for strict punishments to create a deterrence effect against the sexual offences against the children.

Thus, the need for an explicit Act was felt for the offences against children.

Why the POCSO act is more comprehensive than the IPC?

- **First,** in **IPC** the definition of assault is generic i.e. 'assault or criminal force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty'. However, in **POCSO** the acts of sexual assault are explicitly mentioned.
- **Second, IPC** provides punishment for the offence against a victim, irrespective of age. However, **POCSO** is specifically for the protection of the children.
- **Third, POCSO** provides for higher punishment as compare to **IPC** as the victims are children.

The findings of the Courts in the cases of sexual assault-

1. The **Supreme Court** held in **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997)** that the offences relating to the modesty of woman cannot be treated as trivial.
2. The **High Court of Chhattisgarh** in **Pappu v. State of Chhattisgarh (2015)** held the conviction of accused of sexual harassment under Section 354A which requires 'physical contact' and advances as a necessary element. It didn't go into the debate of skin-to-skin contact.

Way Forward

- The U.K. Sexual Offences Act 2003 mentions clearly that touching with sexual intent includes touching any part of the body, with anything else or through anything.
- POCSO act must also be modified to remove such ambiguities.
- However, for the time being, any interpretation which weakens the protection of the children need to be declared ultra vires. As it can set a dangerous precedent in society.

18. Why China should be seen as a partner by India?

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: India should acknowledge the rise of superpower China and prepare to complement its role in reviving the **rule-based global order. It should start looking at China as a partner, instead of a rival.**

Background

1. Recently, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that both India and China remained committed to a **multipolar world.** They should also recognize that a **"multipolar Asia**" was one of its essential constituents.
2. India should also come out of the developing country's mindset and make more clear choices.
3. India's major concerns are related to China and the new US administration looks at China as a 'strategic competitor' rather than a 'strategic rival'.
4. On the security issues, India should not compromise on its strategic autonomy for the US or any other country. It should look for the options of cooperation with China also.
5. In this context, we will discuss how coping with china in the areas where India too has interest can become a win-win situation for both the Asian giants.

How effectively India utilizes its principle of Strategic autonomy?

India pursues its strategic autonomy more effectively than ever in the historical past. For example,

1. India has a "**special and privileged strategic partnership**" with Russia and a "**comprehensive global strategic partnership**" with the US.
2. However, India has been cautious in the relationship with **the U.S.-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.**
3. India's strategic autonomy is also reflected in India's participation. It is involved in both the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization** led by china against western interests and in the **US-led Quad,** against China.

Why China should be seen as a partner, competitor rather than as rival?

1. **First,** in the financial sphere, China will soon become the **world's largest economy**. For the first time, the **Fortune Global 500 list** contains more companies based in China, including Hong Kong, in comparison to the U.S.
2. **Second,** also, there is a possibility that the Chinese renminbi becomes a **global reserve currency** or **e-yuan** becomes the currency of digital payment. For example, the BRI countries are using the **renminbi** in financial transactions with China.
3. **Third,** despite the sanctions imposed by the US, the EU created its own cross-border clearing mechanism for trade with China. All these developments signify the rise of China over the U.S.
4. **Fourth,** apart from this, China is now the **second-biggest financial contributor to the UN. Also,** it has published more high-impact research papers than the U.S.
5. **Fifth,** it has also enhanced its '**soft power'** similar to the levels achieved by the U.S.
6. **Sixth**, also, China's engagement with Eurasian landmass has made one thing sure that the ASEAN countries will not easily move out of the BRI infrastructure, digital, finance and trade linkages.

What needs to be done?

1. Similar to the **EU, India needs to see** china as a partner, competitor, and economic rival depending on the areas of interest.
2. In this context, India needs to push the **Quad** members for assisting the infrastructure development of the BRI. However, it should be in line with the strategic concerns of the region.
3. India and other Quad members can contribute to the development of scientific, technological capacity, and digital economy of BRI countries. It is more fruitful compared to developing an alternative development model.

4. Similarly, India needs to take steps to **reform the global governance** to accommodate multiple views of different stakeholders. For example, with respect to digital data, India has recently expressed that there must be **reciprocity in data sharing**.
5. Moreover, ASEAN countries are willing that India rejoin RCEP to balance China. Other countries are also admitting the bigger role that India can play in the near future.

Thus, as mentioned above, India should act as an emerging superpower. The Asian giants, India and China can have complementary roles, share prosperity and at the same time be independent of each other and of the West.

19. Hard Sovereignty and its consequences

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Development Processes and the Development Industry — the Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Synopsis: India's posture as hard sovereignty will be harmful to India's national interest in the long run.

Background

- Some recent developments in India suggest that India has developed a new posture of engagement with the world i.e. 'The hard **sovereignty'.** This posture suggests that any outsider cannot involve in India's internal affairs.
- This posture will be harmful to the country as well as the external relations of India.

What was the issue?

1. Some recent developments in India have attracted international criticisms. Such as abrogation of article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, the enforcement of **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens** and the Delhi riots.
2. The Centre has repeatedly asserted that these issues are India's internal matters and outside criticisms will not be accepted on these issues.
3. Against this backdrop, recently the External Affairs Ministry issued an official statement. In it, the ministry expressed displeasure over the **social media** remarks by global celebrities on farmers' protests.
4. Moreover, it was followed by the tweets of India's well-known personalities Such as Sachin Tendulkar. These tweets had a message that outsiders have no right to participate in India's internal issues, only Indians can 'decide' for India.
5. These statements illustrate the use of **hard sovereignty** to protect India's domestic polity.

How the use of Hard sovereignty will impact India's national interest?

1. Since independence, India has guarded its sovereignty against outside interference. However, it was used to achieve progressive goals and acted as a bulwark against the misuse of power by powerful nations.
2. In contrast, the recent posture of **hard sovereignty** seeks to attack international criticism over unpleasant domestic developments. This is a case of **hyper-nationalism, and** it will harm the national interest.
3. **First**, India aims to **increase its status and strategic influence in the global sphere**. However, it depends on the relation with liberal democracies.
    - On the strategic front, five of India's key partners in the **Indo-Pacific** are democracies (Japan, Australia, the U.S., the U.K., and France). All of them **share common norms and beliefs** that **human rights are universal.** These countries are the source of the majority of the criticisms received by India in the past 2 years.

- If India resorts to **hard sovereignty** over domestic issues, it will face frictions in its diplomatic relations. This will restrict India's chance for increasing its status and strategic influence in the global sphere.

4. **Second**, **hard sovereignty** will strengthen the **narrow-mindedness** in India and affect the morale of **non-violent social movements**. These movements are necessary for keeping democracies in a good health.
   - Social movements do not follow the orders and trends of sovereign states. Hence, they source their support through **transnational solidarities** to bring important policy corrections within and across states. For example, Black Lives Matter movement.
5. **Finally,** it will **provide a ground to our neighbouring countries** for criticizing India's policy, on the grounds of inconsistency with its stand in international forums. For example, the CAA, 2019 was criticized by India's Muslim-majority neighbours for its non-secular treatment towards its minorities.
   - It will reduce India's choices of seeking international support for human rights violation in the neighbourhood. For example, Human rights violation in Balochistan, Rohingya issue etc.
6. We need to guard ourselves against interventions coming from **vested interests. However,** we also need to distinguish the good criticism from the bad. To retain India's position as the **soft power capital** we need to allow and listen to critics that are important to sustain India's democracy.

20. Budget 2020-21 didn't address the core issues of the ailing health sector
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 2: issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Synopsis: Four important issues ailing the health sector did not find a place in the budget.

Background

1. The budget allocation for the health sector in 2021-22 was (**24 lakh crore)** 137 % more than the previous year (69,000 crores).
2. However, the actual share of Health and Family Welfare was only a third of the total allocation of Rs. **24 lakh crore**.
3. This is because, the increase in budget for 'Health wellbeing' also included funds for drinking water, sanitation, nutrition, AYUSH, health research, vaccination as well as grants assigned by the **15th Finance Commission**.
4. Also, a new centrally-sponsored scheme PM **Aatmanirbhar Swasthya Bharat Yojana was announced as a part of Budget** 2021-22.
5. Even in this case, the funds allocated to this new scheme will be materialized only when the programmes are implemented.

What are the critical issues that have not been addressed by the Budget 2021-22 in the health sector?
Despite the above measures introduced in the Budget 2021-22, it has failed to address the four critical issues ailing the health sector. They are

1. **First,** the Budget has failed to find a solution to bring down the costs **of outpatient treatment.**
   - **Under Aayushman Bharat,** 50 crores of eligible poor people are entitled to cashless hospitalisation. However, the cost of drugs, the high cost of high-end diagnostics leads to **high out-of-pocket expenditure** before a patient needs hospitalisation.

- This ultimately reduces the number of people using affordable health care services. It defeats the very purpose of **Aayushman Bharat.**

2. **Second,** Insurance coverage for the middle class is not adequate. Under the Ayushman Bharat health Programme, only 50-crore poor people are covered.
   - Whereas another 10 per cent organised sector employees are covered by different government or employer generated medical coverage schemes.
   - Still, around 30 crore Middle-Class Indians are without any state-supported medical insurance.
3. **Third,** the Budget has failed to give effect to the 2017 **National Health Policy recommendation**. The Policy recommended for **grading of clinical establishments** to protect consumers rights. The states have not implemented the model Clinical Establishments Act 2010.
4. **Fourth,** the need for a separate **Empowered Medical Tribunal as** recommended by 2017 **National Health Policy,** has not been addressed**.** The complexities of medical negligence or malpractice cannot be addressed by the Consumer Protection Act 1986. Thus, a separate health regulator on the lines of the State and Central Regulatory Commissions is critical for the health sector.

What needs to be done?

1. A viable solution is required to reduce out of pocket expenditure in outpatient care services. This will make public health services more affordable.
2. Some international models can be analysed for health care funding:
   - **In Germany and France**, health care is funded through mandatory contributions of both employer and employees.
   - **The Canadian model:** The Canada Health Act of 1984 makes federal cost-sharing a government responsibility. Healthcare entitlements in Canada are also portable across the country.
3. The **Employees State Insurance Corporation** scheme created in 1948 could also be modified and used to cover white-collar employees in the unorganized sector.
4. Public health and hospitals can be brought on the concurrent list of the Constitution as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission. This will bring uniform principles and regulations throughout the state and ensures standards in consumer protection.

21. Misuse of Specialised agencies

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

Synopsis: Governments' actions against journalists have raised suspicion. Specialised agencies are being used to curb dissent.

Background

1. Recently, the Enforcement Directorate raided the office of independent digital news platform **News Click.**
2. The ED is investigating the involvement of the digital news platform **in the** alleged **money-laundering** of ₹30 crores.
3. It is unclear that **News Click** in any way is related to the alleged money laundering.
4. However, critics alleged that this operation is in response to the in-depth coverage of ongoing farmer protests and country-wide protests against the CAA, earlier.
5. Organizations representing the media have raised their concerns over this action.

Why the ED's raid has raised suspicion?

The following arguments will explain the reason for rising suspicion on government actions.

1. In many instances, the government has used central agencies such as the CBI, ED, IT, and even the NIA to attack its critics. For example, Journalists who are reporting on farmer protests are facing repressive action.
2. It is also a fault on specialized agencies to be politically involved. It is against the principles of **non-partisanship.**
3. Laws that are used against critics on a regular basis, should be used in extreme offenses that too as a last resort. For example,
   - Law of Sedition, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act based on the allegation of anti-national activity, Promotion of social enmity or outraging religious sentiments laws.
4. Some relief has been provided by the Supreme Court in the past. However, it is not possible in every case.

A responsible and responsive government should be open to the voices of critics. Indeed, dissent is an essential part of the Democracy.

22. Issues in Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill 2020 (MTP Bill) does not confer women the rights over their own bodies.

Background

- Recently termination of pregnancy was legalised up to the 14th week of pregnancy by Argentina's Congress.
- Parliament of India will also debate the abortion law in this budget session.
- However, the proposed Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (MTP Bill) is also not providing autonomy to women, unlike Argentina.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971

1. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971 was enacted to reduce the maternal mortality ratio due to unsafe abortions.
2. The MTP Act only allows termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. Further, it requires a second doctor's approval if the pregnancy is beyond 12 weeks.
3. The grounds on which a pregnancy can be terminated are-
   - If there is a grave risk to the physical or mental health of the woman.
   - If the pregnancy results from a sexual offense such as rape or intercourse with a mentally challenged woman.

Issues in the MTP Act:

- **First,** the act provides the State with control over women's rights through legal and medical methods. It gives no regard to the woman's choice of keeping or terminating her pregnancy.
- **Second,** it promotes **arbitrary interpretation.** In one case, the Court held that there were no grounds for abortion since the pregnancy was the outcome of a voluntary act. The woman knew the consequences of her Act.

Thus, due to such circumstances women recourse to the unsafe method of abortion. This is the third-largest cause of maternal deaths in India.

Now, the draft MTP Bill 2020 is under consideration. But it is also not providing women with the required autonomy.

Issues in the proposed Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

1. **First, The Bill continues** the legacy of **hetero-patriarchal population control.** Thus, men's control over women's bodies will continue.
2. **Second, It still** requires the signature of one doctor on termination of pregnancies up to 20 weeks old. For pregnancies between 20 and 24 weeks old, approval of two doctors is required.
3. **Third,** The Bill mandates the setup of a Medical Board in every state. The Medical Boards require giving opinions based on the facts regarding the termination of pregnancies. However, their personal beliefs could impact their opinion.
4. **Fourth,** The Bill allows safe abortions in case of 'foetal abnormalities' at any stage of pregnancy. However, it does not consider valid situations for abortion like personal choice, sudden separation or death of a partner or domestic violence.
5. **Fifth,** the word 'women' has been used in the proposed bill. This can deny access to safe abortion to transgender, intersex, and gender diverse persons.

Way Forward

Termination of pregnancy is a woman's choice to decide her life's decision as an adult. Women can be responsible for their own choices.

The Government needs to understand the fact that States or doctors have no right to deny a woman a safe abortion. Otherwise, it will put questions on women's empowerment in the nation.

23. Disengagement agreement in Pangong Tso region

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: Both India and China have agreed to withdraw troops from Pangong Tso region. Both the countries will return to the position of April 2020 (before the stand-off took place).

Introduction:

As per the agreement reached by the 9th corps commanders meeting on 24th January, both Indian and Chinese troops began **systematic disengagement** on the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso located in eastern Ladakh.

Background:

Source: Indian Express

- The North and South banks of Pangong Tso are one of the **most sensitive points.** These points mark the onset of the standoff that began in May 2020.
- During the stand-off, Chinese troops marched to the ridge line of finger 3 and 4. Whereas, India's perceived LAC (Line of Actual Control) was at finger 8.

- In August 2020, India obtained **some strategic advantages** in the region by occupying certain peaks. After that, Indian troops started positioning in Magar Hill, Mukhpari, Gurung Hill, etc. It pressurized China to enter into a negotiation.
- Recently, India and China finally reached an agreement on disengagement at Pangong Lake.

About the agreement:

1. The agreement calls for disengagement along the Pangong Tso region. It includes the pulling of tanks and troops from both sides.
2. The forward deployment will return to pre standoff status quo in a gradual manner, along north and south banks.
3. In the north bank, **China will pull back to finger 8** and **India will get back** to its Dhan Singh Thapa post **near finger 3.**
4. The area between finger 3 and 8 will become a **no patrolling zone** for a temporary period.
5. Any **construction** done post-April 2020 is to be **removed** by both sides.

Significance:

- The agreement is expected to **restore the pre-standoff position** and **sustain peace** in the region.
- It would be an initial step. Based on that, **future negotiations** will take place.

Concerns in negotiation:

- There is a **lack of trust** between both India and China. It will prevent the attainment of lasting peace in the region.
- **The probability of escalation of violence by China** still persists. For example, Both the countries were involved in the Galwan Valley clash after a pull-back of their troops in June 2020.
- Pangong Tso is just one point of friction. **Focus on other areas is also required.** Else the efficacy of this disengagement would also be questionable. The other areas that require focus, are:
  - **Gogra Post** at Patrolling Point 17A (PP17A)
  - **Hot Springs area** near PP15
  - PP14 in **Galwan Valley**
  - **Depsang Plains,** which is close to India's strategic Daulat Beg Oldie base

Way forward:

- The focus should now be on the disengagement and gradual withdrawal in the entire region, not only the Pangong Tso region.
- The unresolved issues must be solved **based on 3 principles**:
  1. Mutual acceptance and respect of LAC
  2. No unilateral alteration of LAC
  3. Mutual adherence of bilateral agreements

24. Reasons behind India-China disengagement agreement along LAC

Source- **Indian Express**

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The Sino- Indian disengagement agreement in Pangong Tso region is the first step towards ending hostilities along LAC (Line of Actual Control). Focus should now be on other areas of friction like Kailash heights and Depsang plateau to bring lasting peace.

Background:

- India and China have finally agreed to enter into a disengagement agreement **along Pangong Tso region**. This agreement has been reached after nine months of hostility.
- The agreement was reached in the **9th corps commander meeting** that was held on 24th January 2021.
- It was **mutual understanding and changing world scenarios** that helped in this agreement.

What are the possible reasons behind this disengagement agreement?

Experts are of the view that the Chinese aggression was a response to **the rising strategic confidence of India** in the region, since 2015. A lesson was to be taught to India and the vulnerable situation during the pandemic, gave Chinese just the right opportunity to execute its move. The following changing world scenarios are behind this agreement:

1. The **new Biden-Harris alliance** in the US promised greater stability in the South China Sea. Now, Chinese won't like to further **deteriorate its global image. They** might be trying to deliver the message of cooperation.
2. On the part of India, the **sensible diplomacy** coupled with **strategic advantage** obtained at Kailash heights improved its bargaining power. It assured that China sits on the negotiation table and cooperate.
3. The discipline showed by India in the economic and trade domain also **refrained China from using its media warfare doctrine.** It induced China to engage in constant talks.
    - **Media Warfare Doctrine**-It is a doctrine that involves action to deny, exploit, corrupt or destroy the enemy's information and its functions.

Suggestions:

- **The disengagement terms** should be **respected** so that agreement leads to conflict resolution and not a postponement. It was seen in the earlier Doklam and Nathula stand-off, after reaching disengagement.
- **Trust** needs to be established between frontline commanders else there is a possibility of escalation due to new friction, as seen in Galwan valley in July 2020.
- Talks on **other areas of friction** are ongoing at Depsang plateau and Kailash heights. The present agreement should be used as a step towards lasting peace.
    - China has an upper hand in the Depsang plateau and India commands an edge over Kailash heights.

Future engagement must be guided by **showing mutual respect** towards each other's territorial sovereignty and integrity.

25. India-Australia relation: Towards sustainable future

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: How India and Australia are working towards a sustainable world.

Background

- The year 2020 witnessed the spread of the Pandemic, bushfires in Australia as a consequence of climate change**.** It has taught the following important lessons to the world.
    - The need to strengthen the resilience of our global communities.
    - The importance of innovation, resources, and leadership to protect and support our communities.
    - The need for global cooperation is critical to contain global average temperatures below 2° Centigrade.

- Traditional Indigenous knowledge about the land is important together with modern science. **For example**, using traditional fire management practices, through cool and controlled burns.
- In this context, we will discuss the steps taken by Australia to adapt and build a resilient economy against climate change. And how the India-Australia partnership is working towards this goal.

How Australia is ensuring resilience to its communities?

- **Funding:** Australia will invest ₹1,500 crores in its natural resources, environment, and water infrastructure. It will increase resilience to drought and climate disasters. It is also spending more than ₹200 crores on bushfire recovery efforts by supporting local communities.
- **Building Institutions**: Australia is establishing a new **National Resilience, Relief, and Recovery Agency**. It aims to reduce natural disaster risk, enhance natural disaster resilience and ensure effective relief and recovery to all hazards.
- **Global cooperation**: It has pledged to contribute ₹150 crores to **global climate finance** from 2020 to 2025. About ₹50 crores of this funding will be used to help the Pacific countries to deploy renewable energy, and improve their climate change and disaster resilience.
  - They are also committed to share their experiences and skills with the world through its Development Programme and the **Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific**.

How Australia is collaborating with India to build resilient economies for the future?

India and Australia are collaborating in various fields to mitigate the effects of climate change. It will be helpful to build resilient future economies. Some of them are

- **First,** collaboration in **disaster management**. Both the countries are working as close partners in global initiatives such as **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure** and **International Solar Alliance. It is** spearheaded by India and ensures the development of resilient infrastructure against climate change.
- **Second,** collaboration in the field of **Water Resources Management**. Both the countries aim to enhance each country's water management capabilities and share expertise and best practice.
- **Third,** collaboration in the field of developing **green technologies** to lower carbon emissions. To achieve this, Australia has released the **Technology Investment Roadmap**, a comprehensive plan to invest in low emission technologies to the tune of ₹7,000 crores by 2030.
  - It focuses on accelerating technologies like hydrogen, carbon capture use, and storage, soil carbon, energy storage.
  - It will ensure the widespread global deployment of these technologies by the partnerships with growing economies like India.
- **Fourth,** the **Australia-India Joint Energy Dialogue.** It will strengthen cooperation between the two countries in various areas like: pumped hydro storage, cost-effective battery technologies, hydrogen and **coal gasification**, adoption of **clean energy technology**, **fly ash management** technologies, and solar forecasting and scheduling.

Way forward

- In the path towards **climate action**, it is necessary for us to engage all stakeholders equally and respect **indigenous culture and knowledge**.

- Also, we need to prioritize practical actions that help us adapt to those changes and strengthen the resilience of our local environments.

26. What are the issues in the government's order to Twitter?

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The government ordered twitter to shut down user accounts connected with the farm protests. This order hampers fundamental rights and also reveals a complex relationship between the government and large platforms.

Introduction

The growing digitization of Indian society can be seen in the ongoing farmers' protest. A new hashtag trends on Twitter for and against the farm laws or protests every day.

- Twitter is quite significant in India despite a lower number of users as compared to Facebook or WhatsApp. It is because Twitter is the default social network for political leaders and foreign governments to make statements.
- The government exercised its powers under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act to block user's accounts critical of the farm bills.
- Suspended accounts are in large numbers and include a diverse category of users from farm unions, activists, and press publications.

What are the issues in this decision?

The step is against the rights of the users who are not given reasons for the censorship. Secrecy impacts the public's right to receive information, which is an essential part of the fundamental right to speech and expression.

1. **First,** the public has incomplete information as the **actual text of the legal orders was not disclosed**. This is an anti-democratic practice that results in unchecked growth of illogical censorship and also leads to a lack of trust.
2. **Second, this outcome has been the failure of the Union executive and Supreme Court.** Former framed the process for blocking websites in 2009 and included the secrecy provision; the later failed to examine it.
   - For example, the court stated in Shreya Singhal, that a person whose website or account was blocked under section 69A could approach a court. However, accessing legal remedies is difficult when the direction for blocking is secret.
3. **Third,** several state governments are **refusing to publish orders on internet shutdowns even after RTI has been filed.**
4. **Fourth, due to absence of any prior notic**e, users are not given an opportunity to present their defense. This is conflicting with the principles of natural justice. This again goes back to the vagueness and the design faults in the process of how directions under Section 69A are issued.

The way forward

- In Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India, the court was judging the constitutional acceptability of the telecommunications shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir. In its judgment, it gave a direction for pro-active publication of all orders for internet shutdowns by the government.
- Thus, the directions of blocking should be made public in other cases as well.

Conclusion

Twitter refused to comply with directions by citing the policy of proportionality. This unconstitutional law is being applied to its maximum capacity. It is creating a sense of

confusing that a government formed under the Constitution may be failing to fulfill its duties when other platforms that trade in our data for profit are more ready.

27. Self-regulatory codes for OTTs should be allowed

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies

Synopsis: The government should consider allowing the Over-The-Top (OTT) services to self-regulate themselves. Recently, they published a new tool kit to implement the **self-regulation code of 2020.**

Read – Self-regulatory toolkit by OTTs for implementation of Self Regulation Codes, 2020 – ForumIAS Blog

Background

- The **Over-The-Top (OTT)** services in India have witnessed an increase in subscription revenues during the Pandemic. The growth has been so significant that major films are now getting released over OTTs, against the earlier trends.
- The growth of OTT and the absence of censorship regulation for the OTT's supported the growth of **creative talent** in the film-making industry.
- However, there are growing concerns regarding the misuse of **creative freedom.** Many court cases have been filed against them.
  - For instance, in UP the Amazon Prime Video series has been charged with cyberterrorism, obscenity, promoting social enmity, and defiling places of worship.
  - Similarly, in M.P, a petition has been filed, seeking a court direction to bring OTT channels under the censorship laws.
- Following these developments, the I&B Ministry stated its intention to bring **regulatory code** on the content for OTT platforms.
- In this backdrop, recently the Internet-based **Over-The-Top (OTT) services** operationalized a **self-regulation code.**

Why the government needs to allow the self-regulation code?

- **First,** the code of self-regulation is in accordance with the **Indian rule of law.** It accepts IPC rules, laws on women's and children's rights, copyright and age-appropriate certification, and parental control. It also upholds the **constitutional right to free speech**.
- **Second**, it is also consistent with the 2016 **Shyam Benegal committee recommendation** on film certification. Some important recommendations are,
  - Creative expression should not be curbed in the process of classification of films. It leaves viewing decisions to audiences.
  - Furthermore, it also recommended for classification of films on the basis of viewer' age.
  - It called for ensuring transparency in the way reviewing bodies are constituted.

The idea of pre-censoring films and forcing arbitrary cuts based on prejudice is against the values of liberal societies. Hence, the self-regulatory code operationalized by the **Over-The-Top (OTT)** services should to be given a chance.

28. Need of reforming the blocking powers of Government

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Synopsis: The government's use of is blocking powers under Section 69A of Information and Technology Act 2000 (I.T Act) attracted criticism. There is a need to reforms the blocking powers to ensure free speech in Indian democracy.

Background:

- Twitter **suspended some user accounts** based on Emergency restriction orders issued by Government under **Section 69A. Govt. issued** this order in wake of violence in farmer's protest on 26th January in Delhi.
- The apparent reason behind such an order was the use of a controversial hashtag #ModiPlanningFarmerGenocide. It could have disturbed the public order.
- However, later on, Twitter **reactivated** some of the accounts that didn't violate Indian law. It attracted a sharp reaction from the Indian Government. A **non-compliance order** against Twitter and its employees was issued for violating Section 69A.
- At present, a **temporary peace has been established, after a** meeting between Twitter officials and the government**.**

Government's power to block online users:

1. **Section 69A of I.T Act 2000**:
   - It empowers the government to order an intermediary for blocking access to any information in the digital world.
   - The grounds for exercising the power are; threat to national security, public order, sovereignty and integrity of the country etc.
   - A punishment up to 7 years can be imposed on intermediaries who don't comply with the government's blocking orders.
2. **Blocking Rules 2009**:
   - It tells the **procedure** which needs to be followed for **blocking online content**. As per these rules, the orders are subject to **review** by government committees. Further all orders and complaints should remain strictly **confidential**.

- **Issues with Blocking Power**:
  1. **First,** the government can issue restricting orders without any evidence. It **undermines the Fundamental Right to free speech**.
  2. **Second**, the confidentiality of orders makes it very **difficult for users to challenge** it in open courts. There is no requirement of giving any reason or hearing opportunity is a clear **violation of due process.**
  3. **Third,** These rules make censorship an easy and costless option. It places the burden of going to court and gathering the evidence on the user.
  4. **Fourth**, The framing of section 69A is in such a way that protection of online free speech mainly **depends on the courage** shown by intermediaries against government's blocking orders.

Way Forward:

1. Reforms should take place in compliance with prior judgments of SC. In the **Shreya Singhal case**, the court allowed challenges to blocking orders in high courts. In the **Kashmir Internet ban case**, the court said any order restricting access to the internet should be put in the public domain.
2. The government should block access to information only when an affected party is given a fair hearing in courts. Direct blocking should be permissible only in emergency situations.
3. Blocking orders must be put in the public domain along with proper reasoning. The power of government to limit the flow of information needs to be rationalized.

At present the extent of free speech depends upon the capacity of multinational social-media platforms to face governments. Twitter managed to stand up against a clear case of overreach. However, other companies may not show similar courage, especially in cases of borderline overreach thereby threatening free speech. Thus, the demand to ensure free speech must come from citizens themselves.

29. 'Disengagement activities' for reducing Sino-India tensions

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: India and China have simultaneously begun disengagement activities around the Pangong Tso region in eastern Ladakh. It is a laudable step for reducing tension between the two countries.

Background:

- The two countries were undergoing severe tensions since May 2020. It is when the Chinese army entered 8 km inside Eastern Ladakh.
- This Chinese encroachment along east of finger 8 along the LAC (Line of Actual Control) led to unprecedented clashes. The most severe was the Galwan valley clash that caused casualties at both ends.
- Almost 10 months after the first clash, China agreed to enter into a conciliatory agreement.

About the agreement:

- It calls for a **systematic and coordinated withdrawal** along the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso region.
- China has to pull back its troops at Siriraj, east of Finger 8 and dismantle infrastructure created after April 2020.
- India has to return to its Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.
- A **temporary moratorium** on patrolling activities has been imposed along the northern bank of Pangong Tso.

Reasons behind China's altered stance:

- **First**, **good diplomacy** was shown by the Indian government that didn't surrender to Chinese demands.
- **Second**, a **strategic advantage** was gained by Indian army at Kailash heights in the southern bank which enhanced its bargaining power.
- **Third**, China realized that a long stand-off will only **hamper bilateral relations** and would give little gain.
- **Fourth**, the **growing closeness of India-US** and their greater engagement in the **QUAD group,** might have pressurized China to alter its stance.
  - **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is an informal group of the US, Japan, India and Australia. The group aims to maintain a rules based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Way Forward:

- The agreement must be implemented in letter and spirit to **re-instill the lost trust** between the countries.
- The focus should be on doing robust **verification and monitoring** in order to ensure its effective implementation.
- The success of this disengagement agreement will also open gates for **negotiation on other friction points** like Hot Springs and Depsang plains.

30. Issues in 15th Finance Commission Recommendation

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein

Synopsis: The recent 15th FC report recommendations have been criticised on the basis of two grounds. **One,** the recommendations will impact **co-operative federalism**. **Two**, the recommendations are not aligned with the changing federal structure in India.

Background

- Recently, the 15th Finance commission (FC) report has been tabled in the parliament. It's following key recommendations have been accepted by the government.
  1. The Commission has recommended a total devolution of Rs 8,55,176 crore to the states, which is 41% of the divisible pool of taxes.
  2. It also recommended for **revenue deficit grants** of Rs 1.18 lakh crore to the states.
  3. Furthermore, it recommended a **non-lapsable defence fund.** The grants component of the states has been reduced by 1 per cent (from 42% to 41%). It will be used to set up special funds for defence.
- The FC's recommendation for the **vertical devolution** at 41% is pragmatic. However, some of its recommendations will have an implication on the **co-operative federalism**.

What are the issues in the 15th FC recommendations?

- **First,** the **1% cut in the devolution is for special funding on defence**. It means states are paying Rs 7,000 crore for defence and internal security. But, Defence and National Security are the centre's responsibility as per the 7th **Schedule** of the Constitution. This use of funds from states to finance the Centre's expenditure is against the **spirit of cooperative federalism**.
- **Second,** the issues in the **horizontal distribution of funds**. Successive finance commissions have used the criteria of need, equity for devolving 92.5 per cent of funds to a state. Whereas 15th FC has reduced this to 75%. And the remaining 25% will be based on efficiency and performance. This is the lowest weightage for equity, making the 15th FC transfers the least progressive.
- **Third**, 15th FC recommendations do not depict the changed fiscal conditions. For example, after GST, the tax collection method has changed from a **production-based tax system** to a **consumption-based tax system.**
  - This structural change has a significant impact on the interstate distribution of tax. It is not taken into account by the 15th FC report.
- **Fourth,** the approach for **distributing revenue deficit grants** has not changed. The 15th FC could have recommended a **minimum-guaranteed revenue of 14 per cent** to every state.
  - This unchanged policy approach has resulted in an increase of **statutory and non-statutory grants** to almost 55 per cent of the total transfers. Whereas the aggregate transfers have dropped to 45 per cent. This makes the devolution process more discretionary.

31. Climate activist arrested in 'Toolkit Conspiracy'

Source: The hindu, Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

Synopsis: A 22-year-old climate activist got arrested for misusing a toolkit. Such instances raise a question of alleged misuse of power by the government officials.
Read More – Toolkit conspiracy case and its imapct on India- Explained Pointwise – ForumIAS Blog

Background:

- The Delhi Police has already registered multiple First Information Reports (FIRs) post the 26th January farmer protest in Delhi.
- They have now arrested Disha Ravi, a climate activist from Bengaluru for editing a toolkit published on 3rd February by climate activist Greta Thunberg. It was used by social media users to protest against the farm laws.

What is a tool kit?

- It is simply a document containing a set of directives for social media campaigners.
- It includes the hashtags to be used, persons to be targeted, duration of campaign and other things for a systematic and synchronized online campaign.

Read more about tool kit conspiracy case
Reason for Arrest:

- The allegation is that the toolkit was made by Pro – Khalistani separatists. Thus, editing it amounted to **sedition and incitement to riots**.
- The government believes that activist is part of a **global conspiracy** to incite violence in the country by secessionists based in Punjab.

Issues with Arrest:

- **First**, the Delhi Police didn't' seek permission from the state Police. By that, it disobeyed interstate arrest guidelines formulated by the Delhi High Court. Further the accused was not allowed to be properly represented by a counsel.
- **Second**, the toolkit doesn't contain any directions which led to direct incitement of violence. It was a necessary condition for sedition.
- **Third**, it undermines democratic power when people are arrested due to excessive suspicion and not on merits. Thereby undermining due process.
- **Fourth**, such arrest shows non judicious use of police power which will diminish India's Global image.

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on addressing the tolerance gap in governance and not on using more repressive strategies.
- The masses shouldn't feel that their rights are not respected by the government and free speech should not be curbed by illegitimate means.
- In the case of Ravi, an impartial investigation to establish her crime should be done.

32. Government's Notice to Twitter: Why Twitter's actions are justified?

Source: click here
Syllabus: GS 2 : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
Synopsis: Twitter has acted with reason after defying the Indian government's legal orders. It didn't implement the order fully and this action is desirable despite the criticism.
Introduction
Twitter did not act in accordance with the Indian government's orders under Section 69A of the IT Act. It was required to block hundreds of accounts under the order.
However, Twitter has said that the list had **accounts of journalists, activists, and politicians.** Twitter believes that blocking these accounts would not be fair to Indian law and the platform's contract objectives.

- This defiance has not gone down well with the government. Independent verifications revealed **that many accounts did not post messages suggesting a genocide plan but supported farmers' protest.**

What were the criticisms against Twitter?

Twitter witnessed criticism on multiple grounds such as:

1. **First, Twitter's refusal shows a lack of respect for Indian law** because it is bound by legal orders of the government under the Act.
2. **Second, Twitter is a private company, and it cannot decide what is proportionate or lawful**. Twitter can challenge the order in a court, but cannot choose to comply partially.
3. **Third**, Twitter's decision indicates that it is denying parity to India with the U.S. The platform blocked Donald Trump's account but refusing to block users in India.
4. **Fourth, its defiance indicates the increasing power** and liberty of Big Tech. It requires a clear and plain zero-tolerance response.

Why Twitter's actions are justified?

1. The tension between the government and social media platforms **is healthy and constructive. It keeps a balance,** which was not possible if both were on the same side.
2. Following government's orders blindly will seriously impact **twitter's audience's fundamental rights**. Twitter also has a responsibility to ensure people's right to free and informed speech.
3. **Big Techs has often sided with the government hurting its users' rights**. For instance, the Wall Street Journal reported that Facebook India failed to act on provocative posts of a member of the ruling party. It is good that Big techs are thinking about users.
4. Twitter didn't ban Trump's account all of a sudden despite the repeated promotion of lies. His account was spreading misinformation during the Capitol Hill riot. Before suspending his account, Twitter tried to flag his content and limit its reach. A permanent ban was the last step. **Demanding a direct ban is against this process of twitter.**
5. The current incident is among the rare instances that **Twitter has given equivalence to its Indian audience with that of its U.S.'s.** Twitter chose to take an independent view of the matter and not blindly complied with the wishes of the government.

Way forward

- The attempt to extend similar safeguards to Indian users as the US users enjoy is a welcome step. That would also be consistent with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights endorsed by the UNHRC.

33. 'ICC ruling' over Palestinian Territories

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2 – Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

Synopsis: The recent ICC (International Criminal Court) ruling allows it to prosecute war crimes in Palestinian Territories. The ruling has been welcomed by Palestine but criticized by the U.S. and Israel.

Background:

- Israel had been accused of committing atrocities in Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967.

- Palestine joined the ICC in 2015 but remained silent towards the atrocities during the Trump administration. It was because it didn't want to end U.S. aid towards Palestinian Territories.
- It is notable that the US Congress was allowed to freeze US Aid in Palestinian territory if Palestine pursues its own legal matters.
- The change of administration in the U.S. allowed it to be more focal in the ICC. The recent February 2021 ruling of ICC is a result of this changed stance.

About the Ruling:

- It allows the ICC to **investigate** persons committing **war crimes in the Palestinian Territories** of West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- However, there is no possibility of immediate investigations, even on the cases already filed in front of ICC.

International Criminal Court:

- It is the only court in the world to try individuals for international crimes.
- It is headquartered in Hague, Netherlands.
- Not only that, but it is empowered to try crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression.
- A war crime is an act that constitutes a serious violation of the laws of war which includes intentionally killing civilians or prisoners, torturing, destroying civilian property among others.

Significance of Judgement:

- It will ensure **accountability and justice** delivery in the region.
- It will ensure that individuals and militant groups like Hamas are subjected to international law. Furthermore, it will impose **adequate criminal responsibility** on them.

The response of various countries:

- **Palestine**: It welcomed the judgement as a step towards correcting past injustices suffered by the country since the 1967 occupation of Israel.
- **Israel**: It criticised the judgement of being Anti-Semitic and accused the court of ignoring atrocities done by Iran and Syria in the region.
- **US:** It objected against the judgement and reminded that Israel was not a member of the ICC.
- **India**: It has refrained from commenting on the judgement based on its geopolitical interest as both Palestine and Israel share a good bond with it.

ICC has said that any future conduct would be based on a thorough examination of judgement based on principles of impartiality and objectivity.

34. Significance of Telehealth services like Remote SMAs

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Normal health Services in India. The telehealth services like **Remote Shared Medical Appointments (SMAs)** should be used.

Background:

- The March 2020 lockdown reassigned healthcare professionals towards COVID-19 specific duties.
- This deviated the focus from other healthcare domains in India and across the world.

How Covid-19 disrupted normal Health care services:

- As per a survey of WHO, Essential services like immunization and childcare got disrupted in the majority of the 105 countries surveyed.
- Around 45% of low-income countries witnessed a disruption in 75% of services. While this figure for high-income countries was only 4%.
- **Impacts on India**:
  - Fear of transmission and lockdown resulted in the fall of diagnostic services. In tuberculosis detection cases 50% fall was reported from April-December 2020. Whereas, in antenatal care visits 56% decline was observed during the first half of 2020.
  - The inequalities got widened when people in rural and remote areas were not able to travel to cities for getting specialized care.
  - However, the use of technology helped to mitigate the impact.

Virtual Consultation India

1. The **E-Sanjeevani platform of the Indian Government** provides virtual consultations to patients. It includes patient-to-provider and provider-to-provider consultation.
2. **A hub and spoke model** used for this platform. It connected smartphone-equipped rural wellness centers to specialist doctors located in cities.
3. Private players and non-governmental organizations also used the technology for reaching out to patients.

However, given the scale of India's population which is devoid of healthcare, a switch towards remote shared medical appointments is needed.

About Remote Shared Medical Appointments:

- **Remote Shared Medical Appointments** virtualizes the process of in-person shared medical appointments (SMAs). It is an effective practice in the US for more than 2 decades.
- Thus, It involves the **virtual interaction of a doctor** with **multiple patients** having similar issues.
- **Advantages:**
  - Patients get more time with doctors.
  - This process develops a sense of bonding among patients.
  - This process provides better productivity as patients learn from each other's questions.

Utility for India:

1. SMAs have been very effective in the case of diabetes. It is notable that India is home to the largest number of diabetes patients.
2. Aravind hospital in Puducherry has **shown the potential of SMAs** to combat glaucoma, a disease that causes gradual blindness.
3. Offering this facility through the E-Sanjeevani platform can help the country **meet the healthcare gap in rural India.**
4. SMAs will encourage people interaction and attract supplementary providers like physiotherapists and optometrists.
5. The **current COVID-19 vaccine drive** will also be strengthened as providers can offer sessions to burst the myths related to vaccine efficacy.

Way Forward:

1. The switch to a new technique of healthcare delivery will require adequate training and mentoring of both providers and patients.

2. **Collaboration with training platforms like ECHO** is desired to encourage the adoption of virtual SMAs. It trains primary healthcare providers in multiple states.
3. India is blessed to have **very low data rates** where 1.5 GB data/day is easily affordable for many Indians. This automatically gives the country a significant edge towards augmenting telehealthcare.
4. Further, the strengthening of digital health services will also be in line with **WHO's Global strategy** on Digital health. It would help in realizing the dream of '**Health for All".**

35. The case of Four Capitals or the Supreme Court bench in South India

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: The proposal of four capitals may not be feasible in India. However, a Supreme Court Bench in south India can be created.

Introduction

West Bengal's CM Mamata Banerjee suggested that there should be four capitals of India. She is of the opinion that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in rotation. However, the proposal is not feasible.

Why is the plan not feasible?

Each one of the Four Capitals will require parliament buildings, accommodation for all the MPs, and adjunct staff. Moreover, there will be other cost involved with it:

1. **First,** if constructed, these **residential accommodations would be vacant for a year or 2**. There would be an **added cost of traveling for all the MPs** and their staff.
2. **Second, it will overburden the state police.** All the MPs and their vacant accommodations will require security round the clock.
3. **Third,** depending on the risk factor**, enhanced security** will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of MPs.
4. **Fourth, the cost to the government exchequer** to have capitals in three other States will be huge.
    - For instance, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister proposed to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli in central Tamil Nadu in the 1980s. It was shelved due to the huge burden it would impose on the State exchequer.

The case for SC bench in Southern state

The Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India in 2021. This demand needs consideration.

1. **First,** there is a long-distance between the southern states and Delhi. **Many people cannot afford to travel** all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases.
2. **Second,** the excessive fee of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another constraint.
3. **Third,** Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of the Court of Appeal with 15 judges each should be created across the country. It will **reduce the burden of the Supreme Court.**
4. **Fourth, moreover, Judges would be able to go through each case thoroughly. Thus, it will ensure** the delivery of a well-thought-out verdict. However, implementing this would require an amendment to the Constitution.

The way forward

This arrangement will allow the Supreme Court to deal with constitutional issues. With cases rising in various courts, a practical solution needs to be worked out. Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

36. Need for a balanced approach on 'Bilateral Investment Treaty' for India

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis: Sri Lanka's revoked the **East Container Terminal (ECT) agreement** without any valid reason**. However,** Indian investors can't oppose this decision under International Law, due to India's withdrawal from Bilateral Investment treaties (BIT). This calls for adopting a balanced approach towards **BITs**.

Background:

- An agreement to jointly develop ECT at Colombo port was signed between Sri Lanka, Japan and India in 2019.
- In February 2021, the Sri Lanka government pulled out from the agreement.
- This hampered the interest of Indian investors as they can't approach international tribunal for protecting their interest under India-Sri Lanka BIT.

Read more – Sri Lanka Writes Off Strategic Colombo Port Deal With India & Japan | ForumIAS Blog

India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Investment Treaty:

- It governs the treatment of foreign investment between two countries on the basis of International Law. **India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Investment Treaty** was signed in 1997.
- It has a provision of **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).** It allows individual foreign investors to sue host states in international tribunals if treaty obligations are violated.
- It calls for giving **Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET)** to foreign investments in the host state under **Article 3(2)**.
  - A core component of **FET is the protection of legitimate expectations of investors.**
  - **In International Thunderbird Gaming Corporation v Mexico Case**, the concept of legitimate expectations got clarified.
- It is a situation in which the act of the host state creates a reasonable expectation in the mind of the investor to act in line with such expectation. Failure to fulfil such expectations would cause damage to investors.
- India- Sri Lanka BIT also has a **survival clause under Article 15(2).** It protects investors interest for 15 years if the treaty is unilaterally withdrawn by either party.
- India withdrew from the treaty in 2017 due to a high number of ISDS cases filed against it. But survival clause **assures protection to Indian and Sri Lanka investors till 2032**.

Why can't Indian investors sue the Sri Lankan Government for revoking 2019 agreement?

- Although the act of Sri Lanka to withdraw from 2019 agreement is a clear breach of the principle of legitimate expectation. But the Indian investors can't appeal for protection.

- **Survival clause** gave protection to investments made before India's withdrawal from the treaty in 2017 and not to investments after that. It is due to this **cut-off date t**hat investors of 2019 ECT agreement can't do much regarding Sri Lanka's withdrawal from the agreement.

Way Forward:

- India must **understand the reciprocal nature** of BITs. The withdrawal will save it from ISDS claims but would also hamper the interest of Indian investors abroad.
- Decisions of withdrawal need to be taken with greater caution in a post-Covid world where the probability of taking arbitrary actions by foreign governments is quite high.
- The need is to adopt a **balanced approach towards BITs** that doesn't subject India to multiple ISDS claims nor harm the interests of Indian investors in foreign countries.

37. Evaluating India- China Disengagement agreement on Pongong Tso

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: India-China disengagement process on the border is ongoing**.** There is a need for the cost-benefit analysis of this disengagement process.

Background:

- Recently, both India and China have announced the start of **disengagement** between the two armies in Ladakh.
- The current disengagement is limited to two places on the **Line of Actual Control** (LAC) in Ladakh:
  - One, the north bank of Pangong lake
  - Two, Kailash range to the south of Pangong.
- However, the disengagement in other regions is yet to take place. The other three sites of contention on the Ladakh border are **Depsang, Gogra-Hot Springs, and Demchok.**

Why the disengagement from the north bank of Pangong lake got prioritized?

1. **First,** nearly a quarter of all the Chinese transgressions on the LAC between 2014 and 2019 have taken place on the north bank of Pangong lake.
2. **Second,** the north bank of Pan gong lake is a famous tourist spot. For example, the Hindi film 3 idiots was shot here.
3. **Third,** the decision seems to be a political priority. There are habitations close to the north bank and any Chinese ingression can be easily sighted from here. Any report of Chinese encroachment will bring embarrassment to the center.

Is the disengagement from the Kailash range a good move?

1. Kailash range was the only place where the Indian military had leverage against the Chinese army. The Chinese army was insisting on disengagement from this area first.
2. Initially, India was pushing for a simultaneous resolution of all the flashpoints on the Ladakh border. However, it did not happen.
3. Disengagement seems to be the right step. However, giving away the only leverage (Kailash range) that India had, along the LAC, needs to be debated**.**

What is the significance of Depsang plains?

Depsang plains are situated in the **Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) sector. It** is a strategically important place for India because of the following reasons;

1. **One,** its proximity to the **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road**, the **DBO airstrip,** and the **Karakoram Pass**.

2. **Two,** it poses threats to Indian control over the **Siachen glacier.**
3. **Three,** it is the only area on the Indian landmass where China and Pakistan can plan a collusive military attack on India.
4. **Fourth,** also, a former northern army commander identified this area as tough to defend in case of a Chinese military attack.

Thus, Depsang plains are strategically significant. India needs to find a holistic solution to **Depsang issue**.

How effective is the solution of creating a buffer zone?

The creation of Buffer zones has been effective to date in controlling the India-Chinese clashes around the LAC. But there are some issues,

1. **First,** it denies India, access to the areas up to PP14, which it patrolled earlier.
2. **Second,** there are worries that such buffer zones would lie majorly on the Indian side of the LAC. Thus converting Indian-controlled territory into a neutral zone is required.
3. **Third,** 'no petrol zones' has not been announced publicly yet, in all the contentious border areas along LAC. For example, Kailash range. Any violation may result in a Galwan like clash.

Thus, buffer zones can only provide a temporary solution. They are no alternatives to the **mutual delineation** and a final settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary.

Suggestions for India

- The **Centre for Policy Research produced a Non-alignment 2.0** strategy in 2012. It advocates for taking a prompt **quid pro quo** military operation in Chinese territory in case of escalation.
- However, this strategy may result in a military confrontation. Considering India's economic crisis, India won't pursue a quid pro quo strategy.
- Rather, India should enhance the deployment of troops along the LAC. It will prevent PLA ingression from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.

The government has made a choice to seek restoration of peace and tranquillity on the LAC instead of a reversion to the status quo as of April 2020. Any strategic consequences of that choice should be managed by the government in the future.

38. An Analysis of 15th Finance commission's recommendations

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2: Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

Synopsis: The 15th Finance Commission recommendations are slightly different from the other Finance commission's recommendations. It has introduced many revolutionary changes that can shape India's future.

What are the major challenges faced by 15th Finance commission?

The 15th Finance commission (FC) had faced many challenges while preparing its report for the year 2021-26. Some of them are,

1. One, the issue of using 2011 population census data. The southern states were against it.
2. Two, the issue of creating a **non-lapsable defence fund**.
3. Three, using certain parameters for calculating performance incentives to states.
4. Fourth, the 15th FC was required to prepare the fiscal roadmap for the Union and state amid a shortfall in the GST collection and the Pandemic.

How the 15th FC report addressed these challenges?

1. **First,** the 15th FC recommended **vertical devolution** at **41 per cent** to states against 14th FC recommendation of 42% devolution. The 15th FC adjusted 1 per cent for the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.
2. **Second,** for **horizontal distribution**, it introduced **efficiency criteria** for tax and fiscal efforts of states. This is expected to harmonise the principles of revenue needs and performance.
3. **Third,** the 15th FC assigned **12.5 per cent weightage to demographic performance.** By that, it incentivized the southern states for the progress made by them in
4. replacement rate of population growth.

What was the recommendation of 15th FC for distributing grant in aids to the states?

- The grant allocation will be based on the below five categories. 1. Revenue deficit grants, 2. Grants for local governments, 3. Grants for disaster management, 4. Sector-specific grants and 5. State-specific grants.
- The centre in its **Action Taken Report** accepted all the grants except **sector-specific grants** (Rs 1,29,987 crore) and **state-specific grants** (Rs 49,599 crore).
- The Commission also tasked to examine, whether **revenue deficit grants** should be provided at all to the states. Some states argued that providing **revenue deficit grants** will disincentives tax efforts and **prudence** in expenditure.
- However, the FC recommended revenue deficit grants of Rs 2,94,514 crore for (2021-26). It will help fiscally stressed states due to COVID pandemic, such as Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal.

What were the Changes brought by 15th FC regarding grants to local governments?

- **First,** the 15th FC has prescribed the following conditions to local bodies to get access to the grants.
  - Constitution of State Finance Commissions
  - Timely auditing and online availability of accounts for rural local bodies
  - Notifying consistent growth rate for property tax revenue for urban local bodies.
- **Second,** it has also recommended for tying the grants to the local bodies to drinking water, sanitation, solid-waste management and faecal sludge management. This is in line with the national programmes such as Swachch **Bharat Mission** and **Jal Jeevan Mission**.
- **Third,** for the first time, the FC recommends Rs 8,000 crore to states for **incubation of eight new cities**. It also provides for urban grants to **million-plus cities** for improving air quality, to meet the benchmark of solid waste management and sanitation.
- **Fourth,** the landmark recommendation of the 15th FC is the health grant of Rs 70,051 crore through local bodies. It will help to address the gaps in primary health infrastructure.

15th FC recommendations for strengthening Disaster risk management

- The FC recommends setting up the state and national level **Disaster Risk Mitigation Fund** (SDRMF). It is in line with the provisions of the **Disaster Management Act.**
- **Also,** for the first time, it introduced a 10-25 per cent **graded cost-sharing** by the states for the **NDRF and NDMF**. Though, this is not accepted by the states.

15th FC recommendations to strengthen Defence sector

- It recommends for setting up of a dedicated **non-lapsable fund** and the **Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security** (MFDIS) for 2021-2026.

- The fund will bridge the gap between projected budgetary requirements and budget allocation for defence and internal security. It will also provide greater predictability to critical defence related **capital expenditure**.
- It has recommended the following **four specific sources** from where the funds for defence can be sourced.
  1. Transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India.
  2. Disinvestment proceeds of DPSEs.
  3. Proceeds from the monetisation of surplus defence land.
  4. Proceeds of receipts from defence land, which is likely to be transferred to state governments.
- Furthermore, it recommends an allocation of Rs 1,000 crore per annum for the welfare of families of the defence and CAPF personnel who sacrifice their lives in frontline duties.

39. Celebrity activism and government's response to it

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The MEA's response to celebrity activism is fair. But its global reach has to go beyond majoritarian representation.

Introduction

The tweets by international pop singer Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg on farmers' protest created a huge stir.

- **In response, The Minister for External Affairs tweeted about motivated campaigns t**argeting India. It also said that India has the self-confidence today to hold its own. However, MEA's reaction has come under criticism, inside and outside Parliament.
- On the one hand, the hashtag activism was welcomed by the protesting farmers' associations. However, **some Indian film and sports stars tweeted that policy matters are internal to the nation.**

How is celebrity and Twitter activism used globally?

Celebrity activism over human rights is now an established tradition the world over. Twitter diplomacy is a fairly new phenomenon in India, but it is for the MEA to decide how foreign policy is best conducted.

1. **First,** the world of celebrities is firmly rooted in international relations. **It has helped in the growth of global civil society opinion and action**. Many Indian film celebrities such as Rajinikanth and Kamal Hasan are engaged in such activism.
2. **Second,** many celebrities become a member of Rajya Sabha or receive national honours. It is because **political parties also seek to convey their messages to the masses** through their chosen celebrities.
3. **Third, the United Nations makes celebrities its goodwill ambassadors.** Many celebrities are used as brand ambassadors for corporates. For example, the Gates Foundation has engaged in supporting AIDS sufferers in India, and elsewhere.
4. **Last, there is a growing public trust in the image of the celebrity** as a rescuer of victims.

However, celebrity activism has its downside as well. Sometimes they promote ill-informed solutions and glamourizes populist policies, which results in misinformation among the public.

What should India do?

- The MEA should extend its reach beyond **majoritarian representation to the minority.** It has a different opinion from the masses.

- The government should create a wider constitutional trust among the Public. It requires a focus beyond governance and development**.**
- All citizens have a fundamental constitutional **duty to reject violence and develop respect for India's diverse culture.**
- These duties apply equally to the protesters, citizens, government or Opposition, the media, or state and party actors, etc.

40. A robust 'health and well-being budget for 2021-22'

Source: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GKD89ON6M.1&imageview=0

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The government has come up with an integrated health and well-being budget for 2021-22. It would help meet the current and upcoming challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background:

- The pandemic struck India in March 2020 and exposed the vulnerabilities of the Indian health care system.
- Although India's performance in tackling the pandemic was better than various developed countries. But its impact on the economy and society was significant.
- It was therefore imperative to come up with a strong health and wellbeing budget to develop resilience against the ill effects of the pandemic. The health budget was prepared in this context of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Government measures for strengthening 'health and wellbeing':

- A Production linked incentive scheme is announced to boost the manufacture of pharmaceutical and medical devices.
- **35000 crore rupees** has been allocated for the development of COVID-19 vaccine. **Mission COVID Suraksha** has been launched to improve indigenous vaccine testing and development. Further coverage of pneumococcal vaccine will also be enhanced.
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) was launched to provide free food grains to 800 million beneficiaries.
- One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) will target 690 million beneficiaries covering 32 states/UTs.
- Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) has been given substantial allocation.
- There would be an expansion of health and wellness centres under **Pradhan Mantri – Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana (PMANSBY**). It would also involve using a 13,192 crore Finance Commission grant for strengthening the primary health system.
- Allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) has not changed in comparison to last year.
- There has been a **40% increase in Budget** of the Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) Ministry.

Significance:

- **First**, the nature of allocation strengthens the **vision of making India Atma Nirbhar**.
- **Second**, initiatives like Mission COVID Suraksha will help India **sustain** its position of being the **vaccine hub of the world**. Significant allocation towards vaccine development will also ensure all the citizens are able to get vaccinated in due time.

- **Third**, PMGKY and ONORC will help in ensuring **food and nutritional security** in the country.
- **Fourth**, a **reduction in diseases** namely Malaria, Polio and Diarrhoea would be seen due to substantial allocation towards JJM. This is explained by a report released by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in 2019.
- **Fifth**, focusing on **capital expenditure** through schemes like PMANSBY is a welcome step for strengthening the health system. Earlier the capital expenditure used to constitute only a small fraction of health allocation.
- **Sixth**, an improvement in AYUSH Ministry's budget will allow the country to focus more on **preventive care** and integrated treatment.
- **Lastly**, integration of health with well-being (Water, Sanitation and Nutrition) would help in improving the outcomes. Both National Health Policy, 2017 and Economic Survey have stressed the **interdependence of these sectors**.

Way Forward:

India's commitment towards health has allowed it to successfully deliver 8 million doses of COVID vaccine to health and frontline workers. This is the fastest vaccination drive in the world.

- Allocation towards schemes like PM-JAY should be enhanced. A 20% decline was seen in infant mortality rate (IMR) between 2015-20 in states which adopted the scheme in comparison to a 12% in IMR decline in states which didn't adopt it as per the economic survey.
- The states must increase their **health spending to 8%** of their respective budgets by 2022 as recommended by the National Health Policy and Finance Commission. This would reduce the burden on the Centre and ensure effective spending.

The Union Budget has effectively prepared the ground for tackling the upcoming challenges in the health sector. This should be coupled with other reforms so that the resilience capacity of the country gets enhanced. This would help in achieving the vision of universal health coverage by 2030 as part of sustainable development goals.

41. Balancing freedom of speech and national security

Source: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GN689L1EJ.1&imageview=0

Syllabus: GS-2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments

Synopsis: The government warned Twitter over its reluctance in following the executive order for blocking of information. However, the focus should be on balancing free speech and national security.

Background

- The government used its power under **Section 69A** of the Information and Technology Act to block information on the Micro-blogging site.
- This section allows the **government to block any information by issuing orders to a digital intermediary.** National security, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India, etc, are some grounds for blocking.
- The apparent reason behind such an order was the use of a controversial hashtag that disturbed public order.
- The order was only partially followed by Twitter.

Government's Stance:

- Social media platforms should respect the law of the land. Partial compliance is simply a violation.

- Further, there should be consistency in behaviour as Twitter supported police action in Washington's Capitol Hill incident. But similar support was not seen in the 26th January violent protests at Red fort, Delhi.
  - It removed problematic hashtags as the same was spreading the hatred.
  - It viewed the blocking of journalists' and activists' accounts as a threat to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of the constitution. Therefore, accounts were reactivated after some time.

Way Forward:

- Both the government and Twitter are determined not to escalate the issue. The government has only issued a warning while Twitter has refrained from approaching the court.
- There is a need to re-examine the extent of the wide ambit of censorship powers under Section 69A. An opportunity was missed by the court in Shreya Singhal versus Union of India, in which the extent of the section was not rationalized.

In the world's largest democracy, the culture of secrecy and arbitrariness shouldn't be allowed to suppress freedom of speech and expression. The government must view freedom of speech as a facilitator to the security of the state and not an impediment.

42. Issues in Taxing PF contribution

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation**.**

Synopsis: By taxing the income of PF contributions over 2.5 lakhs, the government wants to restrict **High net-worth individuals** (HNIs) who are using the social welfare scheme as a tax haven. Though it is well-intended, it has many ambiguities.

Read More – Budget proposes tax on EPF interest | ForumIAS Blog

Background

- The Union Budget 2021 has proposed taxing the income on provident fund contributions of over Rs. 2.5 lakh a year from 01 April 2021.
- The rationale given for taxing the income from provident fund contributions is to target HNIs. They are using the PF savings to avoid taxation. **For example**, the 100 largest employees' PF (EPF) accounts had a combined balance of over ₹2,000 crore.
- This is not the first time the government had tried to tax PF savings. In the 2016-17 Budget, the government proposed to tax 60% of EPF balances at the time of withdrawal. But due to protest from employees, it was withdrawn later.

What are the ambiguities in this scheme?

Revenue Department has pointed out that the tax will only affect a small group of HNIs. However, the scheme suffers from the following ambiguities,

- **First**, the threshold of taxing contributions of over Rs. 2.5 lakh is very low. It will end up taxing PF income for employees who are investing ₹21,000 a month towards their retirement.
- **Second**, the threshold proposed is also not in line with the ₹7.5 lakh limit. It was set in last year's Budget for employers' contributions into the **EPF**, **National Pension System** (NPS) or other **superannuation funds.**
- **Third**, it creates inequity between India's limited retirement savings instruments. For example, it does not cover NPS **investments** over ₹2.5 lakh a year, but it includes government employees' contributions into the **GPF**.
- **Fourth,** it is also not clear on when and how the tax is to be paid. Either at retirement or each year after the PF rate is announced.

- **Fifth, The CBDT chief** has said that employees should showcase PF income in their annual tax returns. But this may work for GPF members whose interest rate is announced every quarter. Not for EPF accounts, as interest rates are declared late and credited even later.
- **Finally,** this move will affect the fund flow into EPF. This will in turn hamper the government's sources for finance which is largely dependent on market borrowings.

43. Judicial Review and Public Protests in India

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: The timely judicial review of the constitutional validity of laws would have reduced the number of protests in India**.**

Background:

- In the **Shaheen Bagh protest case**, in 2020, SC held that there is no absolute right to protest and public spaces cannot be occupied and that too indefinitely. It affects the right of the general public to move freely without hindrance.
- Recently, the Supreme Court has refused to review its earlier verdict on the Shaheen Bagh protest.

Why the SC decisions on protests are seen as arbitrary?

- **First,** many protests took place because laws passed by the Parliament (**economic reservation**, **CAA, Farm laws**) were not subject to timely **Judicial review.**
  - Almost all the major protests that happened recently in India, involved legal and constitutional issues. The court could not deliver the required immediate and effective adjudication over the constitutional validity of bills.
  - If the court would have delivered the judgement on time regarding the validity of the laws, then the protests could have been probably reduced.
- **Second,** the court is attempting to mediate the issue rather than providing a solution to that.
  - For example, **Shaheen Bagh protest case verdict.** The court balanced its verdict by upholding the **right to peaceful protest** while stating public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely.

Why SC's refusal to review its earlier judgment is not right?

The court's judgment was against the indefinite occupation of public space in Shaheen Bagh protest case. It provides a licence to the police to commit atrocities against the legitimate protest in the name of the occupation.

During the agitations against the **farm laws also, the protesters had to face repressive actions of the state.**

- Protesters prosecuted by the state on serious charges of **sedition** and terrorism.
- Not only the protesters but also their supporters, including comedians and journalists were prosecuted. For example, Disha Ravi (climate activist) recently charged for 'conspiracy against the government'.
- Protesters were denied the **freedoms of expression and peaceful association** provided under **Article 19** of the Indian Constitution.

The Supreme Court is globally seen as a guardian of the **right to dissent**. But it has not provided the protesters with the required support against the state action.

What is the way forward?

- A fair and effective justice mechanism on constitutional matters can reduce the protest on the streets.

- For example, according to **Sociologist Luke Martell** the radical green movement in Britain was at a lower scale when compared with other parts of Western Europe.
- This is because the "**public enquiry system**" in the United Kingdom is good. It processes ecological demands, and integrate them into the political system.
- This minimised the radicalization of the movement arising out of **exclusion and marginalisation**.

- The spirit of judgment in **Himat Lal K. Shah vs Commissioner of Police (1972) should be upheld.**
  - The Court struck down the rules framed by the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner because it conferred arbitrary power on the police officers in the matter of public meetings.
  - **Justice Kuttyil Kurien Mathew**, in Himat Lal K. Shah, explained that "freedom of assembly is an essential element of a democratic system" and that "the public streets are the 'natural' places for expression of opinion and dissemination of ideas".

44. Importance of COVID 19 learnings in fight against tuberculosis

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-covid-19-cases-tuberulosis-cases-in-india-7194807/

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The COVID 19 pandemic has given an opportunity to India for combating other respiratory diseases like Tuberculosis (TB). The learnings from the pandemic can be used to control the spread of TB.

Background:

- The first case of COVID 19 was reported on 30th January 2020. After that, the disease claimed the lives of 1,54,000 people and infected 10.7 million in India.
- However, with robust efforts, the government managed to control its spread. Due to this, the country is not facing a brutal second wave as suffered by other countries.
- The number of active cases is decreasing since mid September and people are getting back to their normal lives.
- The focus should now be shifted to other respiratory diseases like TB.

About Tuberculosis:

- It is a contagious infection that usually attacks your lungs. But can infect other parts like your brain and spine.
- It is a bacterial disease caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis and affecting mankind for 3000 years.
- Furthermore, it is a disease with the ability to damage multiple organs which enhances mortality risks.

Issues with Tuberculosis:

As per World Health Organisation (WHO), India has more than 10 million active cases of TB. 4 lakh lives are lost per year due to TB and shares 1/4th of the global burden.

1. **First**, it causes a disproportionate impact on the poor who live in overcrowded spaces and lack proper nutrition.
2. **Second**, numerous myths and stigma are associated with the disease which discourages reporting and proper treatment.
3. **Third**, it becomes very difficult to control TB if multi-drug resistance gets developed or a person is already suffering from diabetes or HIV.

Using COVID 19 Lessons to combat TB:

- **First**, the **PM must take a lead** to sensitize masses about the disease. It was done by him in the case of COVID 19, to induce behaviour change.
- **Second**, the concept of **physical distancing** can be effective in curtailing the spread. The droplets from one person will not reach another if the due distance is maintained.
- **Third**, patients, as well as nearby family members, must **wear masks** to curb the spread of infection.
- **Fourth**, **improved detection techniques** developed during COVID can be used to replace the traditional sputum tests. This would ensure better diagnosis and quick results.
- **Fifth**, in order to improve tracking and contact tracing, the focus should be on **instant notification techniques**.
- **Sixth**, **awareness is developed around respiratory diseases. It** can be used to build community-led participation and burst the stigma surrounding TB.
- **Lastly**, the enthusiasm shown by media and coordination shown by governments in tackling COVID-19 should also be carried forward to TB.

India has set a target to eliminate TB by 2025 which is 5 years prior to the sustainable development goals target. This can be achieved if COVID 19 learnings are aptly adopted in combating TB.

45. Why Complete Elimination Strategy of COVID virus is not feasible?

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Synopsis: The empirical evidence shows that the idea of the complete elimination of COVID viruses in a selected few countries is not feasible. Rather, it will only increase the **socioeconomic disparities** thereby making the goal of elimination infeasible.

Background

1. A recent article published in **The Lancet** has advocated for "elimination strategy", it is also known as the **zero-COVID-19 strategy** for eliminating the virus.
2. **Zero-COVID-19 strategy** means that the replication of the virus will be reduced to the least so that no new cases will occur in a defined geographical area.
3. The elimination strategy has the following three elements,
   - Rapid reduction in the number of infections to zero.
   - Creation of virus-free green zones and
   - Prompt **outbreak management** when new cases occur occasionally.
4. Rich countries are working on this strategy by vaccinating each and every citizen.
5. However, this strategy of the complete elimination of the virus is not suitable for every country.

Why this strategy is not suitable for all countries?

Complete elimination of the virus by vaccination is only suitable for **geographically isolated countries** such as **New Zealand.** It can afford strict border control measures. Even here, it is difficult because of the following reasons,

- **First,** the virus will keep on circulating in other countries. So, the threat of a Virus outbreak will stay for a while.
- **Second**, the Virus is mutating at a very fast pace. U**niversal vaccination** will not be helpful against new variants. It is difficult to consistently upgrade vaccines.
- **Third**, a zero-COVID-19 strategy will worsen **global health inequities**. The idea of creating green zones for free travel will benefit richer countries and alienate poorer nations.

- **Fourth,** the experience from the elimination of other diseases shows that the complete elimination of the COVID virus is not possible. For example,
  - **Measles and neonatal tetanus** are present for more than 20 years. It caused nearly 25,000 newborn deaths in 2018. Despite the global efforts for vaccination it still remains a major public health challenge in the developing world.
  - **Polio,** eradicated from Southeast Asia, is still endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
  - Also, according to immunologists surveyed by the **science journal Nature,** the COVID virus will become endemic in certain countries.

What are the Solutions?

Instead of isolated strategies for few countries, **global leadership and resources** to vaccinate the vulnerable population are required.

- **First,** disease control measures should be implemented globally. The vaccine coverage for vulnerable populations across the globe should be increased.
- **Second,** the current pace of vaccination needs to be increased by 4.3 times to vaccinate 6.4 million persons per day.
- **Third,** along with this, mapping of elderly and persons with comorbidities needs to be done on a priority basis for vaccination.
- **Fourth**, there is a need to strengthen **epidemiological and genomic surveillance** for COVID-19.
- **Fifth,** a plan for the goal of achieving Universal **Health Coverage** (UHC) is required. Because **t**he COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the gains made in other health programmes like tuberculosis control.

Thus, the idea of eliminating virus in selected few countries should be replaced with a pragmatic goal of controlling COVID-19. Since the zero-COVID-19 strategy comes with zero evidence of feasibility, focusing on it will result in wastage of our attention, funds, and time.

46. 'Weakness of Indian state' in elimination of poverty

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The pandemic has exposed the weakness of the Indian state in fulfilling the needs of the poor. This calls for a change in the current approach to eradicate the miseries faced by the poor.

Background:

- Two books have tried to explain the shortcomings of the Indian state in meeting the aspirations of the poor.
- The books are Locking Down the Poor: The Pandemic and India's Moral Centre by Harsh Mander and Despite the State: Why India Lets Its People Down and How They Cope by M. Rajshekhar.
- They **threw light on the problems faced by the poor** during the pandemic including loss of jobs, shortage of food, etc.
- As per them, the failure is based on the **systematic weakness** of the Indian state which is devoid of the key pillars of a strong state.

What are the key pillars of a strong state:

- It is built with strong support from people
- It has robust administrative machinery for the delivery of services and maintenance of stability.
- Furthermore, it has managerial abilities to shape and implement change.

Issues with Indian state:

- **First**, it is very difficult to develop a shared identity among Indians due to the high degree of **diversity**. Shared identity is essential for obtaining the support of people as seen in the case of strong states like Japan and China. They used Japanese and Han Chinese identities for unification.
- **Second**, apart from the diversity, the Indian state is also suffering from **caste division.** It is often used by leaders to divide the Indian masses.
- **Third**, the Indian bureaucracy performs poorly in the domain of **shaping changes.** This is mainly due to the colonial mindset which focuses more on stability and compliance.
- **Fourth**, governance is **more focused on capitalist ideology. It** induces the bureaucracy to function as corporate managers. This eventually neglects the spirit of socialism which is necessary to uplift the poor people.
- Fifth, the approach of looking at politics as not more than an extension of economics has led to **privatization** of necessary services such as health and education.
- **Sixth**, the approach of strengthening the top of the pyramid and expectation of **improving the bottom through trickle-down effect** has not delivered desired results.

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on uniting the masses around a **modern and inclusive identity** as taught by our constitution-makers.
- The bureaucrats must be given due training in order to simultaneously **balance stability and change**. As too much change can create chaos and no change can solidify the inefficiencies of the current setup.
- Public servants should not function as corporate managers. Rather they must be willing to devote their lives for the welfare of the masses in order to strengthen the process of nation-building.
- The state must realize that it can't function like a private corporation that can easily fire its employees. It must ensure everyone is given due opportunities to grow and prosper.
- The state must now **focus on parameters like economic justice, environmental sustainability,** etc. rather than focusing solely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers.

In a nutshell, India today desires political leaders who can unite the masses, administrators who can deliver good governance, and business leaders who are wealth creators as well as distributors.

47. Overexpansion of IIT's will reduce its standards

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Synopsis: The recent decision by UGC to allow IITs to open branches abroad will jeopardize the Institution's brand. This overexpansion of IITs will reduce their quality.

Background

- The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are India's premier institutes with world-class quality standards. They are among few Indian higher educational institutions that perform well in the global rankings.
- However, in the last decade, the IIT institutes have expanded beyond their capacity. This accelerated expansion is likely to affect its quality standards. For example, Currently, there are 23 IITs as compared to 5 IIT's in the early 1960s.

- Moreover, recently, the University **Grants Commission permitted** selected IITs under the **'Institutions of Eminence'** category to set up campuses abroad. This decision could further weaken the quality standards of IITs.
- So, we need to rethink the changing role and mandate of IITs in order to ensure that quality and focus are maintained.

How the expansion of IITs is affecting the quality standards of the premier institutions?
In recent years, the government expanded the number of IITs throughout the country. This has the following consequences:

- Most of the new IITs are located in smaller towns. Mandi (Himachal Pradesh), Palakkad (Kerala), Dharwad (Karnataka), and others.
- It will be difficult for IITs in small locations to attract top-quality faculty and staff. For example, **IIT Dhanbad** has been approved to hire 781 instructors, but only 301 positions were filled as of January 2021.
- Also, it will be difficult to provide world-class facilities and infrastructure for IITs that are located in smaller towns.
- Thus, inevitably it will lead to quality decline and the dilution of "IIT brand".

What are the other issues hampering the growth of IIT's?

- **First,** IIT's are unable to attract a sufficient number of young faculty to fill vacancies resulting from retirements.
  - Because the salaries offered by IIT's are relatively less compared to the salaries offered by the industries.
  - Also, bright minds are getting attracted to universities and industries in other countries.
- **Second,** exclusive focus on technology and engineering and very less importance given to the humanities and social sciences.
  - Recently, the 2020 **National Education Policy** emphasized that the IITs should focus more on "**holistic and multidisciplinary education**".
- **Third,** lack of correlation between the local needs and IITs. Only a few State governments are effectively utilizing the presence of IITs for **community outreach programmes** through **knowledge-sharing networks**.
  - An effective approach for local area development through IITs could have prevented the resistance of local groups for setting up new IIT in their region. For example, Goa.

What needs to be done?

- **First,** rather than creating new IIT's we need to prioritise **limited "IIT system".** It should be funded at "world-class" levels and staffed by "world class" faculty. Only, 10 to 12 "real" IITs located near major cities are practical for India.
  - Whereas, the newly established institutes can be renamed. After that, they can be provided with sufficient resources to produce high-quality graduates and good research.
  - The recent decision to liberalise the recruitment rules to attract more foreign faculty is a good step in the right direction.
- **Second**, IITs need to pay attention to internationalization by collaborating with the best global universities and hiring foreign faculty. Rather than starting overseas branches we need robust policies to attract international students.
  - This move will produce excellent results and build the IIT's international brand. For instance**, IIT Bombay-Monash Research Academy** and **University of**

Queensland-IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR), are promising examples.

- **Third**, adequate and sustained funding is mandatory from both the government and the **philanthropist** to ensure high-quality standards.

48. A tussle between Australia and Facebook over News Charges

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Synopsis: Recently, a clash erupted between the Australian government and Facebook. The Big Techs in Australia are opposing the Fee to media companies for using their content.

Background

- Recently, the Australian government has proposed the **'News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020'.**
- The Bill aims to make **Google and Facebook** pay to media companies for using their content.
- It also proposes for an **arbiter** to decide the payments. It is important because small publishers have no **bargaining power** against **Big tech companies**.
- Facebook has retaliated with a **news blackout**. It blocked all the news links on its platform. In this process, it also ended up blocking out emergency services such as weather forecast, rescue operation, news related to health, etc.
- In response to this bullying action by Facebook, Australia's Prime Minister has sought global **diplomatic support** for forcing Internet giants to pay media companies.
- In this context, he also contacted Indian Prime minister **Narendra Modi** and Canada's Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** to discuss the progress of **media platform bill**.
- The legislation sets a precedent in regulating social media across countries.

Why the government resorted to draft a bill for this purpose?

- In 2017, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommended a **voluntary code** for internet companies. It was to balance the negotiating power differential between major digital platforms and media businesses.
- However, the businesses were not able to reach an agreement voluntarily. This prompted the government to legislate a mandatory code.

Why the internet companies are reluctant to accept this bill?

The basic argument of both companies is that,

- The media industry is already being benefitted from the traffic routed to them by the digital platforms.
- Also, they are of the opinion that the proposed rules would expose the Internet companies to unseen levels of financial and operational risk.

How it is being regulated in other countries?

- Both the platforms Facebook and Google aim to formalize payment pacts with news companies in several other countries.
  - **For example,** Facebook is planning to launch its news tab feature in the US and in the UK, with likely tie-ups with The Guardian, The Economist, and The Independent.
  - Whereas Google has planned to roll out its news offering platform, **Google News Showcase. It has** 450 publications on board in a dozen countries.

- Similarly, Google has accepted to pay news publications in France for using their content online.
- Even in Australia, Google has opted for a more conciliatory position by signing a deal with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Whereas, Facebook has resorted to retaliation.

Why internet companies are having double standards with respect to different countries?

- Paying for a news feed is not an issue for the tech giants. They have already accepted to pay News publications in France.
- But the fight in Australia is over, how much control these companies would be able to retain on their pay-out process and on operational aspects. For example, the power to decide the payments for news feed sources, revealing changes in their algorithms, etc.,
- European laws have specifically linked payments to copyright, without any pressuring features into the agreements. Whereas Australia's code is entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets and has some coercive features.

What is the status in India?

- According to **a FICCI-EY report** for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals, and aggregators in the country. It comprises around 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.
- Also, India is the **second-largest online news consuming nation** after China. This has increased the revenue for aggregators, news publishers through digital advertising.
- For example, according to EY estimates, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% and is expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.
- Despite huge prospects, a substantial discussion on this issue is yet to begin in India.
- In India, **Daily hunt and In Shorts** are the other major news aggregators. They are yet to find a sustainable revenue model to make payments to publishers.

49. Impacts of School Closures and way forward

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: Policies to deliver education during COVID-led school closures has increased the disparities. Disparities need to be rectified by suitable policy measures to deliver universal education to all.

Background

- Lockdown measures to contain COVID spread has forced the government to resort to school closures.
- The governments tried to address the situation by giving a push to the digital distance learning method.
- However, studies indicate that the initiative failed to take into account existing divides such as spatial**, digital, gender and class.**
- The digital learning methods widened the digital divide between the rich and the poor and the urban and rural areas.

What were the steps taken by the government?

- The government used various means such as text/video/audio content through SMS, WhatsApp, radio and TV programmes to reach out to students and engage them.

- Further, the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development in March 2020 started sharing the following free e-learning platforms.

1.Diksha portal: It contains e-learning content aligned to the curriculum
2**. e-Pathshala**: It is an app by the National Council of Educational Research and Training for Classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages
3. **SWAYAM:** It consists of 1,900 complete courses including teaching videos, computer weekly assignments, examinations and credit transfers, aimed both at school (Classes 1 to 12) and higher education.
4. **SWAYAM Prabha:** It is a group of 32 direct to home channels devoted to the telecasting of educational programmes

What are the issues concerning the use of digital distance learning method?

The attempts at initiating a rapid transition to digital learning following the pandemic have many lessons,

1. **First,** according to a recent **UNICEF report**, the massive school closures exposed the uneven distribution of technology required for **remote learning.** It reduced the chances of **social and economic mobility** through education.
2. **Second,** it also disrupted the significant school programmes that resulted in high enrollment as well as regular attendance. (The mid-day meal scheme, the school health Programme and pre-matric scholarships to girl children).
3. **Third,** the abilities of the families and communities to support their children's education reduced. For example, A survey promoted by the **Centre for Budget and Policy Studies** found that in families which faced cash and food shortages, only 50% of the boys and girls were confident of returning to school.
4. **Fourth,** students with lesser access to digital connectivity forced them to share the burden of household chores. Also, their educational routine disrupted. In many cases, students don't remember what they learnt earlier.
5. **Fifth,** apart from the above issues the education sector faced many challenges. Such as delivery of pedagogical processes, classroom assessment frameworks, students' support and teacher-student engagement.

Case study of Rajasthan:

- Rajasthan has a low literacy rate in India. It is the 2nd worst in overall literacy rate and worst in female literacy rate. (**NSS,2017-18).**
- 20% of girls in the age group 15-16 were out of school against the national average of 13.5 (**Annual Status of Education Report 2018**).
- Despite pioneering initiatives in education such as the **Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi** projects, it suffers from systemic issues in education related to quality, equity and gender.
- In Rajasthan, the access of girls to education during the COVID-19 period was limited to 11%. Girls who had online access reported links through WhatsApp (92%) and YouTube (12%).
- The reasons for students inability to access online education were lack of devices, poor or no internet connectivity, and also girls' preoccupation with household activity.
- In contrast, the schools run by NGO's performed better. They did not resort to online education. Instead, teachers visited individual students at home and also taught children in small groups.

What needs to be done?

- **First**, Education planning should be made context-specific, gender-responsive and inclusive.
- **Second, the** government should take enabling measures even when schools are closed. Such as;
  - providing access to online education,
  - removal of barriers in pre-matric scholarships and
  - ensuring the provision of mid-day meals, iron and folic acid tablets and
  - provision of personal hygiene products to girl students
- **Third,** currently, there are around 300 million children reported to be out of school in India across all age groups. This number can increase once schools will reopen.
  - Hence, the authorities should establish the re-enrolment of children as mandated by the **National Education Policy 2020. Mass outreach programmes** should be developed with **civil society** to encourage re-enrollment**.**
- **Fourth,** to retain the poorest at schools' remedial tuitions and counselling along with scholarships, targeted cash transfers and other entitlements are advisable.
- **Fifth,** we can also think about making secondary education for girls free.
- **Finally,** to implement all these measures we need to support the education sector with adequate budgetary resources**.** Hence, it is important to increase the share of education to 6% of GDP, as emphasized by the President of India.

50. The trend of Undermining the Role of Upper House

Source: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GH88A6BJ6.1&imageview=0

Syllabus: GS 2 – Parliament and State legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges, and issues arising out of these

Synopsis: The ruling party who dominates the lower house is sometimes seen undermining the role of the Upper House. Such an approach dilutes the principle of bicameralism and undermines the spirit of the Constitution.

Background:

- The recent passage of the **Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill** in Karnataka's legislative council has attracted criticism.
- The reason for criticism is that the **bill was passed through a voice vote** in place of a division vote as demanded by the opposition.
- The opposition parties had a majority and didn't support the bill. This has created an impression that the bill was passed without majority support.

Instruments to undermine the Upper House:

- **First**, the use of **voice vote** undermines the higher number of opposition members in the upper house. In this process, the presiding officer gives a decision as per his judgment, because the names or numbers of legislators voting on each side are not recorded.
  - A similar thing was seen in the passing of controversial farm laws by Rajya Sabha in 2020.
- **Second**, the presiding officer sometimes declares a bill as a '**Money Bill'** even if it is not covered under the definition of a money bill.
  - As the second house can only give recommendations on it and can't stop its passage.
  - For Example, Aadhaar, electoral bonds, retrospective validation of foreign political contribution, etc. passed as money bills.

- **Third**, the government **promulgates the ordinance** and frequently re-promulgates it.
  - This is an abuse of temporary legislative power given to the executive who tries to give it permanency by re-promulgation.
  - The objective is to forbid the second house from performing its constitutional role as the majority is already enjoyed in the lower house.

Role of Upper House:

- **First**, it gives **credible second opinions** on bills introduced by the ruling party in the lower house.
- **Second**, to **prevent** the country from the **brute will of the majority** of one party in the lower house. This becomes crucial as even the courts are barred from intervening in the legislative process.
- **Third**, it **duly represents the interests of states** at the national level. Rajya Sabha is representative of all the Indian states.
- **Fourth**, it **upholds the principle of separation of powers** in a robust way. The majority of the executive is often chosen from lok sabha by the ruling party. This allows the executive domination over the legislature and easily passes bills in Lok Sabha.

Way Forward:

- The speaker/chairman of the house must act in the spirit of positive morality. It would allow him to function objectively.
- The demands of opposition should be respected. For example, division vote instead of voice vote should be used.
- The money bill issue can be rightly tackled if the Supreme Court hears the case over its misuse, gives its verdict in due time.
- The executive and ruling party must respect the dissent of the Second Chamber as done in case of repeal of the 42nd amendment.
  - Janta Government was not able to completely repeal it as Congress enjoyed a significant majority in Rajya Sabha.
- Greater focus should be on debates and discussions rather than solely focusing on quick passing of bills.
  - The Parliament was not convened for a long time during the pandemic and later got convened after suspending the question hour so that swift passage can happen. This approach needs to be changed.

51. Centre's decision over Finance Commission's recommendations

Source: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GH88A6BJ2.1&imageview=0

Syllabus: GS 2 – powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

Synopsis: The **15th Finance Commission** has submitted its recommendations for 2021-26 to the Centre. Amongst which maximum have been accepted by the Centre while others are put on a hold by it.

Background:

- The commission headed by **N.K Singh** was required to give recommendations for the period 2020-21 to 2024-25.
- Although due to COVID-19, it was required to submit an interim report for a year 2020-21 and later give a road map for **2021-22 to 2025-2026.**

- Further, the recommendations were to be given keeping in mind the multiple challenges. This included dissolution of the planning Commission, introduction of GST and above all the fiscal and revenue stress induced by the pandemic.
- The commission gave the recommendations based on a judicious interpretation of the unusual terms of reference given to it. This has ensured that recommendations are based on the **principle of equity**.

Recommendations accepted by the Centre:

- **41% of the Centre's taxes** would be distributed amongst the states.
- **Revenue deficit grants** amounting to 2.95 lakh crore would be given to 17 states in 5 years.
- Grants towards urban and local bodies would be conditional upon:
  - Setting up of a State Finance Commission
  - Online publication of Local bodies accounts
  - Sanitation and Water services provided by local bodies (60% weightage)
- Setting up of a **non-lapsable defence modernisation fund** for augmenting capital expenditure on defence beyond the normal budgetary allocations.

Recommendations put on hold:

- Taking out 1.53 lakh crore rupees from the consolidated fund of India to partly finance defence modernization fund.
- Sectors specific and other grants to States amounting to 1.8 lakh crore rupees.

Way Forward:

- The Centre must take proactive steps to win the confidence of States, especially in the current stressful times.
- The instances of introducing more cess and surcharges should be reduced as these are not shared with States, like the recent agricultural infrastructure development cess.
- The Centre needs to take States along with it to drive the country on a sustainable fiscal path and ensure equitable growth throughout the country.

52. Why India-China Border disputes are unresolved?

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its neighbourhood- relations

Synopsis: India and China signed several bilateral agreements for border disputes resolution. However, it has not been to ensure permanent peace at the border.

Background

- The year 2020 witnessed increased India – China border tensions in the Ladakh region, especially the Galwan valley. The incident involved an armed conflict in which soldiers from both sides died.
- It happened despite signing numerous agreements in the past for settling border disputes.

Efforts of bilateral issues resolution between India and China

The agreements were aimed at restoring peace and promoting confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Year	Agreement/ Protocol
1993	Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China Border Areas

1996	Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the LAC
2005	Protocol for the Implementation of Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the LAC
2012	Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs
2013	Agreement on Border Defence Cooperation

- **Key Features of the agreements**:
  - Refrain from use of force against each other
  - Peaceful settlement of disputes should be undertaken
  - Mutual ascertainment of LAC and deployment of minimum armed personnel around it.
  - Prior notification should be given for conducting military exercises and flying combat aircraft within 10 km of LAC
  - Practicing self-restraint in case of face to face military contacts
  - Stipulating the channels that should be used for communication and border personnel meetings in case of emergencies.
- The agreements between India and China were inspired by the success of Russia – China engagements.

How China- Russia resolved bilateral disputes?

1. The relations between China and Russia marked by military confrontation along the border in the 1960s. However, the disputes were duly tackled by new leaders like Mikhail Gorbachev. He promoted CBMs (confidence-building measures) for dispute resolution.
2. Both countries developed a strategic partnership based on equality and mutual trust.
3. In 1990, an Agreement on the Guidelines of Mutual Reduction of Forces and Confidence-building in the Military Field along the border was signed.
4. In May 1991, an Agreement on the Eastern Sector of National Boundaries was concluded by the two countries. This resolved 98% of outstanding boundary issues.

What were the reasons for the success of the China-Russia agreements?

1. Unilateral concessions were made by the bigger power (Russia).
2. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the two countries closer against the common enemy (US).
3. They identified common interests that helped them build broad and institutionalized relationships.

Why are border disputes still persistent between India and China, despite agreements?

- **First**, As per China, Tibet never had the sovereign rights to conclude agreements. Therefore, recognition of the McMahon line (Line of actual control) by India based on Tibet's past agreement undermined China's sovereignty.
- **Second**, China's approach of following a forward policy in the western region often leads to clashes along the border. The recent one is the Galwan valley clash of 2020.
- **Third**, being the bigger power, China has never shown its will for unilateral and asymmetric concessions.
- **Fourth**, the agreements signed between the countries were not nurtured in an environment of equality and mutual trust.
- **Fifth**, the countries have failed to publish a joint declaration on LAC. This is necessary for promoting CBMs between the countries.

Way Forward:

- China needs to change its traditional stance of assertiveness along the border which would help in better implementation of bilateral agreements.
- Further interaction in other spheres like trade and commerce should be carried out despite border tensions as done by both countries till now.

53. Science and Technology in India's foreign policies

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Synopsis: Covid-19 Pandemic provided India an opportunity to mainstream science and technology (S&T) in its foreign Policies. It became possible due to the past achievements by the country in the domain of S&T.

Background:

- The roots of India's scientific programs can be traced to the 1959 speech delivered at the Indian Science Congress by Jawaharlal Nehru.
- He called for a focus on robust scientific research and seeking international scientific advancements.
- Strong countries like the US tried to curb the country's advancements in important spheres like nuclear and space programs. However, despite this, the country managed to augment its S&T potential.

'Science and Technology' in International Relations:

- The country gave **significant support to Asian and African nations** especially in the field of health. This strengthened its relation with Global South.
- In the 1990s, after liberalization, India asserted its scientific interest in a better way. It established the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India in 1999.
- An **improvement in Nuclear and Space programs** was also seen in the 21st century. It was facilitated by growing ties with the US and their joint vision to curb China's assertiveness.
- It also **signed strategic partnerships** with countries like the UK, Canada, etc. that had substantial S&T components.
- The country's **Science and Technology Policy 2003** and **Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2013** clearly relate international S&T cooperation with the national interest.
- To boost international S&T collaboration, A **Cyber Diplomacy Division**, an E-Governance & Information Technology Division, and a New Emerging & Strategic Technologies Division under the Ministry of External Affairs were also set up.
- Very recently, India's pharma firms such as the Serum Institute of India partnered with the U.K.'s Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine project. Similarly, Bharat Biotech produced an indigenous vaccine called Covaxin.

India's efforts for international cooperation during COVID Pandemic:

- Initially, India gave medicines such as hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol to over 150 countries.
- The Vaccine Maitri program was also launched to give vaccines to other countries.
- India delivered vaccines to many needy countries in South Asia and South America very recently.
- India's response was a mark of its advancement in S&T. Moreover, responses were aligned with its Neighbourhood First, Act East, Indo-Pacific and LookWest policies.

What more should be done?

- India should now convert the crisis into an opportunity by launching more programs like '**Vaccine Maitri**'. This program attracted appreciation from multiple countries including Brazil, Canada, and Barbados.
- There is a need of giving **greater financial devolution** towards S&T for achieving self-reliance under Aatmanirbhar Abhiyan. This can be duly leveraged in international relations.
- Further, the participation of states, universities, and the private sector in research and development efforts should also be enhanced.
- Scientists must be made more aware of foreign policy objectives and diplomats about the latest scientific advancement in order to strengthen the integration.

54. Landmark verdict on Sexual harassment and its value for Women

Source – **The Indian Express**, **The Hindu**

Syllabus – GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis – The key takeaways from the landmark verdict on Sexual harassment by Delhi High Court and its value for women.

Background –

Recently Delhi court has acquitted a former journalist in a defamation case filed by a former Union minister.

In this case, a journalist initially made allegations of sexual harassment against the former Union Minister. In turn, a criminal defamation case was filed in Delhi High Court against the journalist by Union Minister. However, Delhi High Court acquitted the journalist of the Criminal Defamation charges in its very recent verdict.

What is the law for Defamation?

- **Defamation –** The act of communicating false statements, spoken or published intentionally with the aim to damage someone's reputation.
- **Punishment Under section 500 of the IPC** – Whoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with a fine, or with both.

Why the Journalist was acquitted in a defamation case?

The law acknowledges that a person's reputation cannot be used as a defense against their own bad behavior. Thus, **Section 499 of the IPC** prescribes several exceptions to claims of defamation. Further, the court held two important observations.

1. The actions of a journalist are not defamation. Instead, it is the attribution of truth. Such attribution will not fall under defamation.
2. The journalist made such actions in order to make good for the public (Public good). The Act of public good also not fall under defamation.

Court's observation-

- Women cannot be punished for raising their voices against sexual harassment.
- A woman has a right to put her grievance on any platform of her choice, even after years and decades. Because, Vishaka Guidelines and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 were not available at the time of sexual harassment
- Only because women are not able to provide evidence, Women's testimonies on sexual harassment cannot be dismissed as false or defamatory.
- The right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of a woman's dignity guaranteed under Article 21.

Way forward

- This historic decision has set an example for women to speak up against sexual harassment regardless of time.
- The verdict was also seen as a huge moral victory for the #MeToo movement.
- Further, The verdict will help to prevent the unethical use of defamation law.

55. Australia's news media bargaining code

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Synopsis – Australian government proposed a bargaining code. This code has provisions to compensate media companies for using their content.

Background

- Australia's recently proposed **News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020.**
- The law would make technology platforms like Google and Facebook pay media publishers. The payment will be made for using their news content by social media platforms and search engines.
- As per News agencies, internet companies became wealthier at their expense by selling advertising linked to their reports, without sharing revenue.
- Google accounts for 53% percent of Australian online advertising revenue and Facebook 23%.

Why this proposed law is justified?

- **First, power imbalance –** Australian government intended to curb the financial imbalance between multibillion-dollar internet companies and news organizations
- **Second, negotiating power-** The law will give individual publishers more **negotiating leverage with internet giants.**
- **Third, these provisions are not new. In France,** Google was forced to negotiate with news agencies for reusing their material online under a neighboring rights' law.

However, many experts believe otherwise:

- The proposed code is **against the principles of an open Internet.**
- **The new law is a result of pressure from powerful media agencies** such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

Way forward-

The proposed law is an Australia Government's effort to ensure that its economy is able to take full benefits of the growth of digital giants. By that, it is also protecting its news media houses. Other governments can also learn from Australia's approach.

56. Why Sedition law needs a relook?

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: Recent charges of sedition against individuals have brought back focus to seditions law. The oppression of dissenters is more dangerous for society. It creates more division in society compared to seditious acts.

Introduction

In Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (1962), the Supreme Court defended the constitutional validity of sedition. It noted that it is a reasonable restriction on free speech as provided in Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

The court also made clear that an individual has the right to speak or write anything about the government. However, it should not result in inciting people to violence against the government.

Why does the sedition law need a relook?

In the Aseem Trivedi case, the Bombay High Court issued guidelines which the police must follow in a sedition case. **These guidelines include an objective evaluation of the seditious material.** By that police must form an opinion on whether the words and actions caused disaffection and disloyalty to the government. However, the law needs a relook due to the following reasons:

- **Firstly,** despite repetitive warnings to **law enforcement agencies by courts,** there is poor implementation of guidelines given by the court.
- **Secondly,** the recent reports show that **the number of cases of sedition under Section 124A increased** by 160%. Whereas the rate of conviction dropped to 3.3% in 2019 from 33.3% in 2016.
- **Thirdly,** in this social media age, information travels at a lightning speed, and Cyberbullies can easily trend wrong information. Any kind of misinformation can lead **to public disorder.**
- **Fourthly, the U.K. abolished the offence of sedition in 2010. Whereas, India is still retaining the law** given by the British Empire.
- **Fifthly, various commissions have questioned the efficacy of such a law in the statute book.** For instance, the Law Commission of India questioned how far it is justified to retain Section 124A.

What steps can be taken to deal with sedition?

Sedition laws will not be repealed anytime sooner. In the meantime, courts can adopt an approach that can balance the issue of National security and the right to speech**.**

- At present sedition is decided based on a content-based test that reviews only the text i.e. even if a written material not caused any social unrest, it can be held a seditious text based on the words used.
- **Courts must adopt an effect-based test** that examines the effects of the seditious text. It means whether the text resulted in violence or not.
- **The principles of justice**, liberty, equality and fraternity exists in the Preamble to our Constitution. Courts must uphold these principles.

It is not the alleged seditious acts that are creating fragments in our society; it is in fact the persecution of individuals and labelling them that are really creating cracks in our socio-political ecosystem.

57. Allowing constructive criticism of Government Policies

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis: India should respect the universal nature of human rights. It should allow constructive criticism of its policies by the Global community. Thus, India should welcome, praise as well as criticism from other nations.

Background:

- The use of military-grade barriers and internet shutdown against Farmer's protest **attracted criticism from global celebrities**. However, the government has advised them to refrain from interfering in the internal issues.

- Moreover, the government has arrested activists (like Disha Ravi) and warned social media companies (Like Twitter) supporting such celebrities.
- It is not the first time global celebrities stood for human rights. They also advocated democratic and human rights in other cases, like for Syrians on an Italian shore, the Rohingya in Myanmar, or Hindus in Pakistan.
- The global community is surprised by such a response. It is because India has itself been a champion and propagator of the universal nature of human rights.

India supporting universal nature of human rights:

- The country **criticized the practice of apartheid** and arbitrary rivoria trail of Nelson Mandela in South Africa. The efforts led to the setting up of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid.
- India was part of the committee that **formulated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** The Declaration was adopted in 1948. This created a list of universal rights available to every human being.
- Indian freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi **played a pivotal role in drafting the UN charter** at the 1945 San Francisco conference.

Respecting the Universality and Indivisibility:

- The framers of the Indian constitution didn't intend to protect the customs and traditions. They adopted liberty, equality, and fraternity ideals of French Revolutions on the basis of following justifications.
  - Liberty without equality will lead to the supremacy of few and equality without liberty would kill innovation.
  - Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things.

Why should we welcome Foreign Criticism?

1. **First**, India itself intervened on matters of other countries on grounds of human rights. The 1971 intervention in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was justified on humanitarian grounds.
2. **Second**, implementation of the latest laws like the Citizenship (Amendment) Act is only possible when criticism from other countries is accepted. The law offers a home for certain persecuted citizens of three foreign countries.
3. **Third**, the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils can be protected when the country is itself open to foreign comments.
4. **Fourth**, the country anyway welcomes praise from foreigners as observed in case of giving refuge to the Dalai Lama. Similarly, some Europeans were allowed to visit Kashmir in order to examine the human rights situation.
5. **Fifth**, public criticism is not a direct intervention in internal affairs.

Way Forward

- India must realize that it can sustain its reputation as the world's largest democracy only when it ensures and secure universal rights for all. This would require giving everyone a sense of security and respecting their dignity.
- Further, the practice of accepting only praise from foreign celebrities also needs to be changed. Constructive criticism also requires acceptance.

India must refrain from shunning the criticism on the grounds of 'internal matter'. India has itself intervened in fellow countries to protect and uphold human rights.

58. Frequent transfer of public servants affect public administration

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Synopsis- Frequent transfers of public servants ultimately affect their morale, performance, and also the public administration.

Introduction-

- An analysis of the executive record (ER) sheets of thousands of IAS officers reveals that the frequent transfers in service are normal.
- But, frequent transfers have an adverse impact on their morale. This will lead to a decline in productivity and efficacy.
- **Few examples of frequent transfer of public servants**
  - IAS Ashok Khemka has been transferred more than 50 times.
  - Pradeep Kasni has been transferred 65 times.

Why frequent transfers happening?

Frequent transfers happen due to two major reasons. Such as,

1. Interference of local politicians in public policy.
2. Transfer guidelines have been undermined by the State governments. The 2nd ARC also highlighted this issue.

What are the impacts of frequent transfer of public servants?

- The officer is not getting the proper time to **focus on the developmental needs of the area.**
  - **For Example-** the **Shopian district** in Jammu and Kashmir for the last 14 years witnessed the transfer of 13 Deputy Commissioners. Among them, two officials were transferred within 25 days of their posting. So the public servants not able to frame proper long-term developmental policies.
- Frequent transfers affect the **functioning of public administration** and **demoralize the bureaucracy.**
- The **Hota Committee report on 2004** also highlighted a few impacts. Such as
  - Frequent transfers will create a **lag in the implementation of government policies.** As the new public official has to know the status of the project, challenges in a particular area, etc.
  - Further, frequent transfers will result in the **wastage of public resources**. This is due to inadequate supervision of the program and large-scale corruption.
- Above all, transfers can create **administrative favoritism** among the public servants and create divisions among civil servants.

Way forward

The government has to frame an **efficient transfer policy.** This will preserve the fundamental principles of civil services such as neutrality, impartiality, and anonymity.

59. Delhi Court's ruling on Disha Ravi Toolkit case

Source- Indian Express

Syllabus – GS 2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions, and basic structure.

Synopsis – Delhi court grants bail to Disha Ravi in its ruling in the tool kit case. It termed evidence produced by Delhi police as inappropriate.

Introduction-

- Delhi Court granted bail to climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested in the Greta Thunberg 'toolkit' case.
- Delhi Police arrested her on charges of **sedition** and **criminal conspiracy** in the Greta toolkit case.

Key takeaways from Court's ruling-

- The Delhi court dismissed the claims as Delhi police failed to show any evidence.
- **On criminal conspiracy,** the Court noted that mere assumption is not sufficient. It should be backed by evidence.
  - The judge stated that only interaction with people of **doubtful credentials is not an offence.**
- **On sedition,** the court cited Kedar Nath case (1962) that actual violence or incitement to violence should be associated with words.
- Moreover, the Court negated the state's "global conspiracy" claims and stated that the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression "includes the right to seek a global audience". Also, "there are no geographical barriers on communication" as long as it is "under the four corners of the law."

What is the Toolkit case?

Toolkit- A document created to explain any issue which provides information on what one needs to do to address the issue.

- Toolkit includes information about petitions, details about protests, and mass movements.
- It also provides a roadmap of how to take forward the protest and what can be done, when and how.

Disha Ravi Toolkit case-

- Delhi police reported that Ravi was the editor of a Google doc (called a toolkit) related to farmer's protest.
- Police alleged her that she started a WhatsApp Group to make the Toolkit doc in collaboration with a **pro-Khalistani organization to spread disaffection against the Indian state.**
- She was charged with **Section 120B [Criminal conspiracy],** along with **Sections 124A (sedition)** and **Section 153A** (Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) of IPC.

60. President's rule in Puducherry: Issue in constitutional and legal provisions for Union Territories

Source: The Hindu

Synopsis: President's Rule has been imposed in Puducherry after all parties failed to make government. Legal and constitutional provisions related to UTs contribute to the destabilization of government there.

Background

- **President rule** has been imposed recently in Puducherry after the Narayanasamy government lost majority support in the assembly.
- This incident is not new. It is very **common** especially when **Union Territories with assemblies** and Central government are ruled by different parties.
- Present constitutional and legal provisions for Union territories facilitate this destabilization.

How the present constitutional set up makes it easier to destabilize Union Territories

Constitution of India under **article 239A** provides for **Legislature and Council of Ministers in Union territories**. The intent behind this move was **to fulfill the democratic aspirations of the people** of these UTs. In other words, the rule of the President under article 239 through administrator is not in line with democratic needs.

However, certain provisions are working as hurdles in achieving the real intent behind these provisions.

1. **First, Article 239A** provides that a local Legislatures or Council of Ministers (CoM) or both can be created for Union territory. It means there can be a Council of Ministers without a legislature or with it or vice versa.
   - In our constitutional scheme, either CoM or legislatures can work alone. The legislature is a law-making body and CoM proposes these laws.
2. **Second,** constitutional provisions provide that **legislature to be a partly elected and partly nominated body**. Center through a simple amendment can create a legislature with more than 50% nominated members.
   - In the case of Puducherry, the Center can nominate 3 members to 33 members in the Puducherry Assembly. Thus, the Centre nominated 3 members of its party to the assembly. This move was challenged in SC. However, SC ruled that the Centre is not required to consult the State government for nomination and **nominated members have the same right to vote as regular members**.
   - **Rajya Sabha** also has nominated members, but, under clause (3) of Article 80, some **qualifications are mentioned for such nominations**. It ensures enrichment of quality of debates.
   - However, it is not the case with Puducherry assembly. No qualifications are mentioned for nominations.
3. **Third, Lieutenant Governor** in the UTs restricts the autonomy granted to UTs. Center can interfere in every decision of the Council of Ministers through LG and President.
   - Article 239 AA(4) and section of UTs act vests the power in the administrator. He or she can **express disagreement** with any policy matter and refer the matter to the President. Then, **he or she can take all actions** he or she deems fit in the matter.
   - In Puducherry too, conflicts between the Lt. Governor and the Chief Minister were perennial.

Thus, past experience proves that the UTs with legislatures have ultimate control vested in the central administrator. It is not workable.

61. Issue of Bail under anti-terrorism cases

Source: The Hindu

Synopsis: Bombay HC granted bail in UAPA case on health grounds. It will set a new example of upholding the individual's right in anti-terrorism cases.

Background

- Bombay High Court granted bail to poet Varavara Rao on medical grounds. He was jailed under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for the Bhima Koregaon case**.
- Recently, Varavara Rao was admitted to the Nanavati Hospital after his condition deteriorated due to some ailments.
- NIA was of the opinion that there is a statutory bar under Section 43D (5) of the UAPA on providing bail if the accusation against a person is prima facie true. Also when the accused has access to treatment in a government hospital. Bail on the health grounds will attract a flood of such petitions.

- However, HC ruled that even provisions of anti-terrorism law cannot curb the right to life under Article 21.

Grounds for Bail in Anti-terrorism cases

1. **Supreme Court ruling in 2019** made it **nearly impossible to grant bails** in the cases of UAPA. It is possible only in the case when one could prove charges against him to be prima facie untrue.
2. However, recently, **SC held that prolonged imprisonment without any near possibility of completion of the trial is a ground for bail**.
3. In this case, too, HC observed the same situations before granting the bail. It was observed that there was no possibility of early completion of the trial. Moreover, charges are yet to be framed.

This HC judgment will set a new precedent of **valuing human Rights over National Security Laws**.

62. Issue of adultery in Civil Services and Army

Source: The Hindu

Synopsis: SC decriminalized the act of adultery in the **Joseph Shine vs Union of India case**. However, it is still not clear whether adultery is the right ground for departmental enquiries against Civil Servants or Army officials.

Background

- **Members of All India Services (AIS) are governed by a moral code of conduct**. It requires them to "maintain absolute integrity and devotion to duty" and do "nothing which is unbecoming of a member of the service".
- Similarly, the **Army Act also contains penal provisions** for displaying "unbecoming conduct" or "disgraceful conduct".
- However, the terms "**unbecoming conduct**" or "unbecoming of a member of a service" are **not defined anywhere**. It leaves the scope for employers or disciplinary authorities to define them as per their own understanding.
- It is the reason that there is doubt whether illicit or adulterous relations are covered under these definitions or not.
- This issue has become more prominent after SC decriminalised adultery in the Joseph Shine vs Union of India case. The Centre has filed an application for clarification with the SC that whether this judgment applies to armed forces or not.
- The matter has been **referred to the constitutional bench**. However, Justice Nariman made an observation while issuing the notice. He **observed** that **even if the law is scrapped**, the **act of adultery will still be an 'unbecoming conduct'**.

Earlier High Court judgment on adultery and misconduct

1. The above observation of Justice Nariman is in contrast to earlier High Court judgments.
2. **Calcutta High Court in Rabindra Nath Ghosh** in a case of adultery held that the head constable who was living with another woman is not guilty of misconduct in the performance of his duties.
3. **Allahabad HC in In State of U.P. vs BN Singh (1989)** held that the act of adultery by a government servant cannot be covered by default within the definition of 'personal immorality'. For that, there should be a relation between the act of adultery and the reduction of his utility as a public servant.
4. **Rajasthan High Court in Mahesh Chand Sharma vs State of Rajasthan (2019)** held that "no employer can be allowed to do moral policing on its employees which go beyond the domain of his public life".

Various HC has declared that **adultery is not a sufficient ground to initiate departmental proceeding** if it is not interfering with official functions. Whereas Justice Nariman has provided a different interpretation. Thus it becomes utmost important to define the terms like "misconduct" and "immoral act".

63. Strengthening decentralisation for improving human capital

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers

Synopsis: The poor performance of India in human capital indicators can be improved if the 3 tier decentralized structure of governance gets strengthened.

Background:

- India has secured a poor 116 rank in the World Bank's human capital index. Further, the data of the National Family Health Survey – 5 for 2019-20 highlights the poor performance in the domain of malnutrition.
- Similarly, issues in learning outcomes are highlighted by the National Achievement Survey 2017 and the Annual Status of Education Report 2018.
- Moreover, these statistics are expected to further worsen due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the focus should be on enhancing the investment in human capital. This would require better decentralisation among 3 tiers – Centre, States and Local Bodies.

Why should there be a focus on a decentralised approach?

- **First**, the government has launched various programs like Poshan Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. But they have failed to deliver optimum results.
- **Second**, international studies show there is a positive correlation between decentralisation and human capital formation.
- **Third**, India spends only 4% of its GDP on human capital which is very less in comparison to its peers. This means these minimum funds should be spent in the most optimum way. It is possible with decentralisation.

What are the existing mechanisms for decentralization in India?

- The Constitution allows the Centre to **support States in their fiscal domain**. This can be done through tax devolution and grants in aid. In addition, the Centre can make 'grants for any public purpose' under Article 282 of the Constitution.
- Education was moved from the state list to the concurrent list by the 42nd amendment in 1976. It ensured **better coordination between Centre and States**.
- The enactment of the 73rd and 74th amendment gave constitutional status to **municipalities and panchayats as the 3rd tier of government**. Further various domains like education, health and sanitation are given to them under the 11th and 12th schedule.
- The 14th Finance commission (FC) called for **distributing 42% of Centre's taxes** among States, an increase from earlier 32%. This was effectively retained by 15th FC as well.

Challenges to decentralisation:

- **First**, significant fiscal support by Centre to States is in the form of grants-in-aid and centrally sponsored schemes (CSS). As per SC ruling in Bhim Singh vs Union of India, these routes are for special, temporary or ad hoc schemes under Article 282.
- **Second**, States have been **reluctant to transfer their power** to local bodies under the 11th and 12th schedule.

- **Third**, the **municipalities and local bodies are not fiscally empowered**. This can be seen by low property tax collection which is under 0.2% of GDP, compared to 3% of GDP in some other nations.
- **Fourth**, even state finance commissions (SFCs) are not constituted on time by respective states for recommending tax devolution and grants-in-aid to the third tier.

Way Forward:

- The Centre must use the route under Article 282 in a cautious way as it is listed as a 'Miscellaneous Financial Provision. It should give maximum fiscal support using Articles 270 and 275, which fall under 'Distribution of Revenues between the Union and the State.
- The Centre should also encourage knowledge sharing between the States which would help them in improving their fiscal potential.
- The 15th FC's recommendation should be duly implemented. It recommended giving no grants to any State after March 2024 if it doesn't constitute SFCs.
- The 3rd tier of government should be vested with all the functions mentioned under the 11th and 12th schedule.

Thus, the need is to leverage the true potential of our multi-level federal system that would help in developing human capital.

64. Flaws in Corruption Perception Index

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 2 – Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Synopsis– Corruption Perception Index as a measure of corruption cannot be used as a base for policymaking.

Introduction-

- **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** is an index published annually by Transparency International [TI] since 1995.
- The index ranks countries by their perceived levels of corruption as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.
- **India's ranking**– 86th with an overall rating of 40.
- Experts argue that there are shortcomings in CPI as it fails to highlight the key issues.

What are the major flaws in CPI?

1. **CPI lacks representativeness**– TI uses only expert reviews and surveys of business owners. It does not use public polling.
   - The index has been under criticism for substantial bias from the powerful elite.
   - It ignores the perception of the poor.
2. **The index is not able to distinguish between a bribe and a customary act. For example**– Global businesspersons may consider **Diwali gifts** as corruption which are customary for locals.
3. **Not all countries are part of the index-** It requires 3 surveys per country. As a result, it is not possible to have many countries in CPI.
   - **For example-** In 2003, only 133 countries were ranked by the CPI.
   - **Makes the ranking order irrelevant**– A country's rank can also change because new countries enter the index and other drops out.
4. **Changing methodology**– Data cannot be compared from year to year as **TI uses different methodologies and samples every year**. This makes it difficult to evaluate the performance of the country.

5. **Perception rating depends on media coverage-** Anti-corruption drive in a country has often translated into declines in that country's CPI score in the following year. **For example-** In 2011, the year of the massive anti-corruption movement, India's CPI rating declined. While Countries that suppress a free press may escape with this.

Conclusion-
CPI is a flawed instrument of corruption measurement, capable of only measuring ambiguous corruption proxies. CPI would be meaningful if used alongside other indices such as the Global Corruption Barometer, Press Freedom Index, and Rule of Law Index.

65. Issues associated with the launch of Coronil
Synopsis: Coronil Launch event is in controversy again. Ministers and public figures must not be seen as endorsing drugs whose efficacy is in doubt.

Background
At a recent event, Haridwar-based Patanjali announced that its **Coronil Ayurveda medicine** has been recognized as a "supporting measure in COVID-19" by AYUSH Ministry. Ministry awarded the Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CoPP) as per the WHO certification scheme.
After receiving certification, the export of medicine has become possible. This event was presided by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari.
The company claimed that it is the **first evidence-based medicine to fight COVID-19**.
This event attracted several criticisms. Indian Medical Association (IMA) criticized this promotion as unethical and a "blatant deceiving of the people of the country".

What are the issues associated with the launch of Coronil?
1. **First,** Patanjali is a private company and coronil is the product of it. As per code of act, Doctors are barred from promoting any drugs and Dr. Harsh Vardhan (Health Minister) is an ENT surgeon.
2. **Second,** Baba Ramdev claimed at the event that WHO endorsed Coronil. Whereas, WHO South-East Asia in a tweet refused any such endorsement.
3. **Third,** the publication of randomized clinical trial of Coronil in a research journal was also put forward as an endorsement by that magazine. These publications are nothing but an initial requirement that put forward the report in front of subject experts.
4. **Fourth,** the published report reveals that medicine was tested only on 95 patients. All of them were asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic but confirmed as RT-PCR positive. This number is very small. Moreover, a large population with mild or no symptoms are getting recovered without any external intervention.

However, it is not the only case, where a drug got approved without any solid research. DGCA previously approved itolizumab by Biocon, which was tested only on the sample of 30. The Covaxin drug also hurriedly got approval and lacked solid scientific evidences.

66. Right to discussion of State Assemblies and interference of the Supreme Court
Synopsis: Recently Facebook India head appealed in the Supreme Court against the summon by Delhi Assembly. SC should avoid any interference in the assembly's right to discussion on important public matters.

Background
A few months ago, Delhi Legislative Assembly issued a notice to the head of Facebook India, Ajit Mohan. The notice was for him to appear in front of the Assembly's Peace and Harmony Committee. This committee is investigating the Delhi Riots.

Ajit Mohan filed a petition against this notice in Supreme Court. Hearing on this case is ongoing.
This petition will have implications on the separation of powers, federalism and fundamental rights in India.

Why Court should not interfere in Assembly's right to discussion
Set of rights and immunities granted to Parliament are called **Parliamentary privileges**. The House of Commons has been granted the right to free speech and right to call for evidence and witnesses in the House since 1689. **Both Parliament and State Assemblies are granted with same privileges.**
There are some misleading doubts that State Assemblies are on par with Parliament on these matters.

1. **First,** discussion in legislatures are not only a part of law-making, it is also used in its **non-judicial power of inquiry**. This inquiry power is inherent to the legislature as it is the voice of people of State. For example: States inquire into the possible ecological implications of a nuclear waste site within the State. States often hear testimony from soldiers and pass resolutions to honour the armed forces.
2. **Second**, it is not necessary that all discussions lead to law making. Some discussions end with the arguments only. Thus, **interference of courts before conclusion of debate** will be pointless.
3. **Third, Co-operative federalism** cannot be promoted if assemblies are barred from even discussing the matters, which are beyond their legislative competence.
4. **Fourth,** Judiciary ought not to enter the domain where it will examine the proceedings of the house. It is **against the Separation of Power**.
5. **Fifth, experiences of Canada and Australia** in this matter also, go against any Court mandated restrictions on legislative competence.

Free speech in the House is a landmark of liberty. It allows elected representatives on behalf of people to challenge the most powerful people of the land. It would be incorrect, if Court appoints itself an arbiter of legislative discussions.

67. Western ideas have to be adapted like China and not to be followed like India
Source: The Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 2 Constitution, Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries
Synopsis: The key to China's immense growth is that it focuses on itself instead of trying to live up to the expectations of the Western countries. India could learn a few lessons from China as it struggles to match up.

Introduction
China and India are the two oldest civilizations and also the youngest nation-states. Both countries got modernized in the late 1940s. China went ahead and imitated the USSR and its authoritarianism.

- China although rejected the Soviet Union as an ideal, continued with authoritarianism. India followed the path of democracy and proved western experts wrong. Because western experts predicted that Indian democracy would collapse soon after Independence.
- Indian democracy was successful among the common people of the country. Despite that, studies generally focus on the failures of democracy in India.
- The greatest failure of Indian democracy as pointed out by many critics is, not able to match the expectations of western democracies.
- However, China has not faced such criticism.

How China managed to develop on its own?

- **First,** China kept local needs and aspirations in mind while using western concepts. They moulded western ideas according to their needs. On the other hand, India simply tried to live up to standards set by the west.
  - **For example,** China abandoned the Soviet economic model as it realized its limitations. It abandoned the Material Product System (MPS) of the Soviets. This method calculated the value of goods based on state-determined prices. It not even included the service sector.
  - China moved towards the Gross Domestic Product and start calculating the value of goods and services on market prices. This gave a psychological boost to the Chinese, and it helped revive nationalism among the young in China.
  - India used GDP calculation from the beginning. When the economy has not grown enough India did not switch to local calculation. Instead, Indian economists start convincing global and local people.
- **Second, timeline of Chinese economy growing larger than Indian economy:**
  - China adopted the GDP as a criterion to evaluate the wealth of the nation in 1993. At that time, its GDP was $0.444 trillion. It was one and a half times higher than the GDP of India.
  - India's GDP crossed $1 trillion and China was touching the $5-trillion figure in 2008. China's GDP remains almost five times more than India's.
- **Last,** China used and moulded western idea sets to **create a knowledge economy**. They spent a substantial amount of money on research and set up their own peer review systems. But India did not spend on research like China did.

Conclusion

Despite India got Independence from the British, western norms and ideas are still assimilated into the minds of Indians. This is the reason for India to remain a follower of western ideas.

68. New social media rules – an analysis

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Synopsis: The government announced the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The experts have welcomed the step but there are some cautious provisions in the new social media rules.

Background of the new social media rules:

- The rise of social media resulted in enormous controlling power in the hands of big technology companies. The government took this step to regulate the misuse of power by them.
- A core framework to determine intermediary liability was ensured by Section 79 of the Information Technology (IT) Act. This was supplemented by operational rules and SC's judgment in the Shreya Singhal V. Union of India case.
- However, the intermediaries were kept immune for the content that is transmitted and stored by them. In return, they had to comply with a set of conditions that were set by the government.
- It is this set of conditions that got translated into Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The rules were jointly announced by the Minister for Information Technology and the Minister for Information and Broadcasting.

About the new social media rules:

- They contain fresh obligations for social media companies and platforms.
- The user should be given a notice before its content is taken down. This improves the accountability of social media platforms.
- The government can direct messaging platforms to tie the identity of the user with the message transmitted by him/her for strengthening traceability.
- An oversight mechanism is being created for digital news media portals as well as for online video streaming platforms. It will perform a similar role like what the Ministry of Information and broadcasting does for T.V regulation.
- The body conducting oversight will also be empowered with censorship and blocking powers as per Rule 13(4).

Read more – Social Media and OTT rules

Criticisms of new social media rules:

- Various aspects of rules **were not put for public consultation** especially those related to regulations of online news portals and video streaming platforms.
- The rules allow the government to **enforce a traceability mechanism.** This simply means a **threat to the user's privacy**. **It will** hamper the end-to-end encryption of platforms like WhatsApp.
- As the new rules **curtail free speech** on these platforms, there will be a **sense of fear** among the users.
- The IT Act doesn't cover content authors and creators like news media, but rules have included them. This provides discretionary powers to the government.
- The proposed oversight mechanism **doesn't have any legislative backing** which is generally given to other regulators. For example, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act provided powers to TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). Under the rules, the regulation will be done by a body composed of bureaucrats. They might perform discretionary censorship.

Conclusion:

The proposed rules seem to enhance political control and enhance fear in the minds of users. They should have been formulated in a more deliberative way involving parliamentary processes. To protect citizen rights, India can frame a regulator like OFCOM in the UK. Anyway, the enactment of new social media rules is still a watershed moment that will transform the digital information ecology in India.

69. Problems associated with Anti Defection Law

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments

Synopsis: The problems associated with Anti defection law got highlighted again in the Puducherry assembly issue. The law was unable to provide stability to the ruling government which led to the imposition of President rule in the State.

Background:

- Some MLAs from the ruling government resigned from the Puducherry assembly. This eventually resulted in imposition of the President's rule.
- This is not only the case with Puducherry, similar instances have been seen in the past in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka as well. Due to that, experts are now pointing towards the flaws of Anti defection law.

About Anti Defection Law:

- The 10th schedule was added to the constitution by the **52nd amendment in 1985**. This deals with the Anti defection process.
- The objective behind such a law was to prevent **political defections and provide stability** to the ruling government.
- As per the 10th schedule, a member can be disqualified if he/she votes contrary to his party directions. The S**peaker/Chairman** is the final deciding authority in this regard.
- The law is applicable to Parliament as well as State legislatures. Further, any person disqualified for defection cannot get a ministerial position unless he/she gets re-elected.

Problems with Anti Defection Law:

- **First**, the MPs or MLAs are supposed to act as per the party's command and not by their own judgment. This **undermines representative democracy** as they are unable to put forward the demands of the people.
- **Second**, the **scope of defection is very wide** as it is applicable on every bill. It is not restricted to important bills only like no-confidence motion, money bill, etc. Moreover, it is also **applicable to members of Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils** which don't have a say in the stability of the government.
- **Third**, it ensures that legislators are accountable to the party and not to voters. Thereby it **reduces their status to mere party agents.**
- **Fourth**, the elected legislators are **unable to ensure independent accountability** of the executive. They scrutinise the working as per collective opinion of the party. This is against the spirit of the Parliamentary system which was adopted to ensure robust accountability.
- **Fifth**, the law also **erodes the constructive role of legislatures. F**ruitful discussion and debates can't happen when the legislators are not allowed to freely express their opinions.
- **Sixth**, the stability of the government is hampered when multiple resignations are used to topple it as seen in the case of Puducherry. The anti-defection law fails to prevent such a thing.
- **Lastly**, there is **no time limit i**n which the Speaker/Chairman takes a call on disqualification. This has led to the creation of unusual situations like opposition members taking ministerial positions as seen in the last Andhra Pradesh legislative assembly term.

Way Forward:

- The **scope of anti-defection law needs to be re-examined. It will enable** the MPs to perform the dual role as a delegate of the constituency and a national legislator effectively.
  - For example, in the recent vote on the impeachment of former U.S. President Donald Trump, seven members from his party voted to remove him.
- The **voters should be more cautious** while casting their votes. Many defectors in States such as Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh got re-elected in the by-polls, thereby encouraging them to do future defections.
- The S**peaker/Chairman should give decisions within 3 months** as advised by the Supreme Court.
- The ultimate solution to defection lies in the creation of **robust exit barriers** by political parties. It includes an opportunity to rise on merits within a party rather than on inheritance.

To sum up, we can say that the anti-defection law has been unable to control the defections. It has reduced the accountability of executives by the legislatures and been unable to provide the desired stability to the elected government.

70. Ceasefire between India and Pakistan: Prospects of strengthening bilateral relations

Source: Indian Express

Synopsis: India and Pakistan have agreed to ceasefire along the Line of Control. But further strengthening of relations will depend upon the security improvement in the region.

Background

- Recently, India and Pakistan agreed to a "strict observance" of all agreements and cease-fire along the Line of Control. This statement was delivered by Director Generals of Military Operations of India and Pakistan.
- It has become possible due to a strong leadership in India. Also, in South Asia there is a chance of building "security community".
- A security community is defined as a region where countries have agreed not to use violence to settle their conflicts.

Why this agreement is important?

- This development is an important confidence-building measure. It is very important because the number of reported violations of the cease-fire across the LoC have increased dramatically in the last year.
- Due to firing impacts collateral damage takes place on the both sides. The most vulnerable sections is the one, living close to the LoC and other sectors.
- They will be the immediate beneficiaries if the statement is implemented in letter and spirit.

Now there is a hope that this move will be the first step towards a gradual normalisation of diplomatic relations. Relations deteriorated since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

What are the positive signals for good bilateral relations of India and Pakistan?

1. Pakistan's leadership (including its army) has now started to understand the futility of a confrontationist course with India.
2. Also, it is in interest of India to strengthen these tendencies by offering incentives to Pakistan that include the promise of a robust engagement.
3. India has also proved that its Neighbourhood First slogan is not an empty one. Under **Vaccine Maitri initiative**, India is providing free vaccine to its neighbours.
4. There is a possibility of signing Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with Bangladesh.
5. If bilateral relations improve, we would witness a SAARC summit in Islamabad with participation of India in it.

What are the challenges?

- Strengthening connectivity and collaboration between India and Pakistan totally depends upon the security commitments.
- The big question now is, Would Pakistan avoid any interference in the Jammu and Kashmir? It would be the test of Pakistan's strategic commitment to rebuilding bilateral relations.

71. Education Ministry circular on online conferences

Source: The Hindu

Synopsis: Ministry of education's circular for regulating online conferences is not well thought out. It will discourage innovation.

What was the circular?

- Recently, the education ministry released a circular to state-funded universities and educational institutions. A per this circular, these institutions and universities need prior official approval from the external Affairs ministry for hosting online "international conferences and seminars online".
- It also prohibits the conference topics related to the security of the state, border, the northeast, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and broadly, any "internal matters". Not only topics, but a background check of participants will be required.
- Event organisers are required to give preference to technological tools and channels not owned or controlled by hostile countries or agencies.
- The circular was issued in consultation with the External Affairs Ministry. Indian Academy of Sciences protested against this circular and suggested a rethink on it.

Importance of virtual conferences

1. **First,** in a pandemic-hit phase, virtual conferences are the only viable channel for researchers to collaborate and discuss various issues with their global peers. The circular created a new bureaucratic hurdle for scientists in public universities, colleges, and organizations.
2. **Second,** virtual conferences were instrumental in the increased participation of thousands of Scientists. It increased attendance at events by 80% in 2020 over 2019 for the Plant Biology Worldwide Summit and over 300% for the American Physical Society meeting.
3. **Third,** these conferences clear out many hurdles like visas, expensive travel, and physical disability, and so on, for the scientists who don't have resources for that. Even researchers and students in the smallest towns can attend these conferences.
4. **Fourth,** India has also made progress in peer-reviewed publications due to these collaborations. It reduces the concerns of biopiracy by documenting natural assets.

Thus, online conferences are very beneficial for research and technology in India. The government should adopt a more liberal approach towards it.

72. NEP's Approach to Effective Education for Children

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The end-of-the-year examination results do not reflect the full potential or uniqueness of a child. Thus, NEP attempts to look beyond examinations and emphasizes child-centered pedagogy.

Introduction

Gijubhai Badheka, an educationist who helped introduce Montessori methods to India, wrote in his book that the school culture in India considers several things of children's interest. It ranges from insects to stars which is irrelevant to classroom study.

- Teachers teach students from the textbook to prepare them for examination instead of developing the child's curiosity. The school does not provide conditions in which the teacher could focus on the overall development of children.
- Examinations should not be the final goal of a rewarding learning experience as it only rewards the power of memorisation.
- Exams are one of the multiple milestones to be crossed by a child on her path to holistic growth and development.

What does the new education policy focus on instead of examinations?

The National Education Policy, 2020, uses two interesting phrases: "No hard separations" and "elimination of silos" in the context of learning.

1. **First**, India is now working on implementing the policy. It **is important to have an understanding of these phrases and their implications.**
   - For example, NEP 2020 requires the achievement of common standards for high-quality education in all schools. It means removing differences between public and private schools through the setting up of a State Standard-Setting Authority (SSSA). It requires a variety of learning from pre-school to higher education.
2. **Second, the removal of hard separations would include removing the barrier of language. For that,** the mother tongue/language spoken by the child shall be the medium to understand the subjects, especially in the foundational years.
3. **Third, teaching and schooling should be activity-based** and experiential. It helps in cognitive growth through story-telling, art, and craft, sports, and theatre.
4. **Fourth, classrooms need to discard the typical seating plan. At present** all the children sit, facing the board. A flexible seating plan which has students sitting in a circle or in groups shall be introduced.
5. **Fifth, schools will need to embrace a variety of teaching** and learning materials. For that, methods such as toys, puppets, magazines, worksheets, comic and storybooks, nature walks, visits to local crafts, etc. are useful.
6. **Last, assessment should only be viewed as a means of learning.** The NEP would help in including more in depth knowledge with fewer curriculums, less content but more proficiency, less textbooks but more diverse learning, less stress but more joy, less assessment by the teacher but more self and peer evaluation.

The way forward

- A lot of research shows that a supportive environment is one in which a child is constantly learning to collaborate, think critically, solve problems, be creative and articulate.
- NEP 2020 wants to break the belief that taking exams on the basis of what is written in textbooks is sufficient. Examination results do not reflect the full potential or uniqueness of a child.

General Studies Paper - 3

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General Studies - 3

1. Indian cricket team's success can be a model for country's manufacturing sector

Source: Indian express

Syllabus: GS 3-Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Synopsis: The good practices behind the success of Cricketing standards can be used in the Indian manufacturing sector. It will make Manufacturing in India more competitive

Background

- India achieved a remarkable victory in Australia recently. It is a result of high-quality governance instituted by the BCCI over the years, to make India's cricket team a global champion.
- Due to this systemic effort, India was able to compete so well against Australia, with a third-choice Indian team.
- Similar practices can be adopted by policymakers for the Manufacturing sector. It can develop India into a globally competitive '**champion manufacturing sector'**.

What are the good practices that policy makers can use?

- **First, Institutionalisation of IPL facilitated the inclusion of Overseas players. Competing against the world's best players** has led to a significant rise in the skills of domestic cricketers.
  - Similarly, allowing foreign industries in India will raise the standards of the domestic manufacturing sector and make them more competitive. For example, Foreign competition in the food sector (McDonald's) has increased the standard and competitiveness of Indian players (Haldiram's).
- **Second,** the mandatory **rule for the preferential treatment for locals. It** limits the number of foreign players, to be used in any team. (only 4 overseas players are allowed in any playing team).
  - This has led to an increasing number of domestic players. English Premier League (EPL) failed to create a world-class England football team due to this fact. EPL is dominated by overseas players without enough opportunities for local players in top teams.
  - So, considering this fact the policy makers should provide some limited protection from destructive competition from overseas. This move will facilitate the growth of Indian domestic manufacturers.
- **Third,** BCCI provided **high-class infrastructure** by setting up top-class cricket facilities in non-traditional cricketing centers. It provided access, opportunity, and a level playing field to all talented cricketers.
  - Similarly, the Government should try to provide **high-class infrastructure in the manufacturing sector**. It includes plugging the existing gaps between Indian and global standards, particularly on logistics. This will make the manufacturing sector **cost-competitive** and enable a l**evel playing field** for every Indian entrepreneur.
- **Fourth,** Success of Indian cricket team has ensured that every good cricketer pursues their dream during studies. This has led to the **retention of the best talent** in Indian cricket.
  - But, It is not the case in manufacturing due to the lack of success and the presence of obstacles. The best entrepreneurial talent of India looks for opportunities elsewhere either in the services (Flipkart) or overseas manufacturing (for example, textiles in Bangladesh).

- For India, to create a robust manufacturing sector it needs to retain the best talent by removing the obstacles.

If policymakers learn the right lessons from cricket and implement those lessons with honesty, we can become globally competitive in the manufacturing sector. To be the best, we must be able to compete with and defeat the best.

2. The rising concern of India's ageing dams

Source: **Click here**

Syllabus: GS 3 – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Synopsis: The ageing dams in India are threatening water security for the future, as the reservoir water is being replaced by soil, technically known as silt or sediment.

Introduction:

- In the race of building large dams, India ranks in the third position in the world.
- India has built over 5,200 large dams. Among which 1,100 large dams have crossed the age of 50 years. Some have even completed over 120 years.
- The number of such dams is going to reach 4,400 by 2050.

What are the issues in water reservoirs of India?

After a certain time period, the Silt or sediments start to replace the water in the reservoir due to Siltation. Therefore, the water storage capacity of the dam decreases with time.

Siltation reduces the capacity of some of India's largest dams. Due to Siltation, the functioning of the Bhakra dam has been reduced from 47 years to 88 years.

The medium and minor dams are even in the worst position. They are in such a dangerous position that they can collapse in the near future. This situation is because of their lower shelf life as compared to large dams.

The High siltation rate shows that reservoirs of India are designed with a poor understanding of sedimentation science.

What are the consequences of the siltation of dams for farmers?

1. **Firstly, it affects crop yield-** when soil replaces the water in reservoirs, water availability reduces. It results in less water for the cropped areas. It increases dependency of farmers on rains or groundwater which is already over-exploited. Reduced crop yield results in low Agri credit, crop insurance, and investment.
2. **Secondly, chances of flooding increases- Due to l**ow capacity, reservoirs cannot store extra water from rainfall. It will lead to an increase in flooding rates.

For Example, The flooding in Bharuch in 2020, Kerala in 2018 and Chennai in 2015

Way Forward

At present 80% of the India's large dams are in a situation of becoming obsolete. India needs to address the situation urgently. As eventually in 21st century, Nation will not be able to find sufficient water. It will not be able to grow abundant crops, feed the rising population by 2050, create sustainable cities, or ensure growth.

3. Budget 2021: Despite some hits, the Budget has crucial misses

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS – 3 – Economy

Synopsis: The recently released budget has got a few things right, but there are some issues as well.

Introduction - The government's response to distress in the economy was below expectations. Public spending was just over 1% of GDP. It was in a situation when GDP growth was in the negative zone and the unemployment rate was high.

In this budget, the government has proposed increasing public investment by 34.5% in the upcoming fiscal year. It is a positive step for the economy.
However, the finances for investment depend upon several factors like tax revenue, disinvestment proceeds, sale of rail and road assets, etc.

How this Public Investment would be realized?

1. **First,** The government would **increase public investment** by borrowing. It will be an additional ₹80,000 crore for the purpose in the next two months.
2. **Second,** States will be allowed a higher fiscal deficit, in case of capital expenditure. If the capital expenditure plan outlined in the Budget speech is implemented with assured financial backing, it can revive the investment cycle.
3. **Third, The Development Finance Institution (DFI**) proposed in the budget. There was lack of long term credit for infrastructure in the last decade. The most successful industrializing economies have been utilizing DFIs for providing long-term credit.

What are the issues in the budget?

1. **First,** DFI mentioned in the budget will be financed by **foreign portfolio investments (FPI), which is a cause for concern.** FPI represents short term inflows with exchange rate risks. This investment will certainly lead to currency and maturity miss-match, increasing the cost of capital.
2. **Second,** The NFHS data for 2019-20 indicated that constructing **toilets in households is of no use unless adequate access to water** and sewage facilities are provided. Thus, the effectiveness of such investments depends upon coordination with other facilities.
3. **Third,** The Budget has **not mentioned the unemployment and migration crisis** due to pandemics which led to the rise in economic inequality. The budget did not consider a special tax on the super-rich.
4. **Fourth,** There is **no targeted employment program** to alleviate the immediate crisis is a matter of concern.

Way forward

There is a need to consider alternative long-term sources, preferably from domestic sources, or international development agencies to make DFI a success.

4. Proposal to establish Bad bank and Development Finance Institution [DFI]

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment

Synopsis- Budget 2021 proposed the formation of bad banks to manage NPAs and DFI for raising funds.

Introduction

- **In Union Budget 2021 -22,** Finance Minister has proposed to set up an **ARC** (Asset Reconstruction Company)/**AMC** (Asset Management Company) for non-performing asset (NPA) management.
- Additionally, the government proposed a **development financial institution (DFI). It will** enable long-term funding worth Rs. 5 lakh crore in the next 3 years **for infrastructure projects.**

What is the purpose of setting an ARC/AMC?

The COVID-19 disruption has already created a lot of stress in the banking system. The banks already have a gross NPA of around 7.5 percent, which is expected to rise to 13.5 percent by September 2021.

Thus, setting up ARC/AMC has been proposed, which aims to buy bad assets of commercial banks. It will sell these assets at a discounted price in the market. This institution is commonly known as a **bad bank. Experts at bad banks attempt a resolution through a professional approach.**

It will enable banks to focus on fresh loans and investments. This will help clean up the balance sheets of commercial banks and thereby make available more funds for lending.

Challenges:

1. **First, Moral Hazard** – According to some experts, the formation of ARC/AMC can enable banks to continue **reckless lending practices**.
2. **Second, Mobilizing capital –** Finding buyers for bad loans in a pandemic hit economy will be hard.

What is the purpose of setting up DFI during Union Budget 2021-22?

Development Finance Institution [DFI] –The DFIs are organizations owned by the government or charitable institutions. They provide funds for infrastructure projects that are of national importance but may or may not conform to commercial return standards.

In Budget 2021-22, Development Finance Institution (DFI) has been announced with the following specifications.

- Capital base = Rs 20,000 crore
- Lending target = Rs 5 lakh crore in three years.
- **Aim**– The proposed DFI will be used to finance social and economic infrastructure projects identified under the **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP).**

Challenges:

The earlier generation of DFIs ran into the problem of financing. The retail deposit access was cornered by commercial banks and the availability of long-term financing without government guarantees was limited.

Way forward

- The formation of ARC/AMC works as a relief for banks hit by soaring bad assets and a sluggish loan off-take amid the pandemic.
- The economy needs infrastructure investments more than ever to help it overcome the damage induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. A need to enhance intelligence system in combating the Maoists

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3- Linkages between development and spread of extremism.

Synopsis: Casualties in left-wing extremism (LWE)-affected States have not stopped. There is an urgent need to enhance the intelligence system in these areas.

Introduction

After the 2008 attack on CRPF, the massive deployment of security forces was witnessed in the left-wing extremism (LWE)-affected States.

With the improvement in the law and order situation in J&K, more security personnel have been deployed in the region.

The newly deployed personnel are undergoing intensive training and firing practices with the following objectives:

- To make them familiar with the terrain.
- To understand the modus operandi of the Maoists.
- To take precautionary measures.

Thus, the security forces have reduced the incidents of violence in LWE- affected States. The Maoists are either on the run or surrender.

However, casualties among security forces have not stopped.

What more needs to be done?

The government must take the following measures to stop attacks on the security forces:

- Setting up and upgrading the **Intelligence systems in the region**.
- Inclusion of **Belgian Malinois Dogs** to timely detect IEDs.
- **Drones are useful** in accessing difficult areas.
- Security Personnel should stay in **pucca buildings** instead of huts. As temporary huts are more prone to attacks and destruction due to change in weather.
- **Increase in the allocation of funds-** For the construction of accommodation, an amount of Rs 114 crore was demanded against a project. However, only Rs 33 crore was allotted.

Way Forward

The LWE- affected States needs their own Commandos to control the LWE regions effectively. As for now, many districts have been declared free from LWE activities. But still, for some years Central Armed Police Forces will have to be stationed there until State relies completely on their own Commandos Such as Greyhounds and the Jharkhand Jaguars.

6. Budget 2021 paid less attention to Hunger and Malnutrition

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS 3- Government Budgeting

Synopsis: Global pandemic and economic slowdown led to the health and economic crisis. But, the Union Budget 2021-22 did not pay attention to hunger and malnutrition.

Need of Food Security

- **High rate of child malnutrition- National Family Health Survey-5** showed that child malnutrition levels in 2019 were higher than in 2016 in most of the states.
- **COVID-19 effect-** A field survey conducted by Hunger Watch and the Azim Premji University. It found that food intake between Oct. 2020 and Dec. 2020, was low as compared to the Pre-lockdown levels.

Budget 2021-22 allocation

Policy/ Scheme	Budget Allocation	Required Allocation
1. Anganwadi Services	Rs 17,252.3 crore	Rs 24,810 crore
2. National Nutrition Mission (Poshan)	Rs 600 crore	Rs 3,700 crore
3. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (Maternity Benefits)	Rs 1,300 crore	Rs 2,500 crore
4. Mid-day meal	Rs 11,500 crore	Rs 12,900 crore

Thus, this shows that there is not much allocation done towards nutrition schemes, even after the increase of prevalence of malnutrition.

What are the challenges faced by nutrition initiatives?

India's nutrition initiatives such as Anganwadi programme and school mid-day meals are crucial for the nutrition of children and pregnant and lactating women. However, these initiatives faced disruption during COVID pandemic. Moreover, they are suffering from the following shortcomings:

- **Real-time data are** not available about stunted and wasted children in India.
- The initiatives also suffer from **under-utilization of allocated funds.**
- Many ministries and departments related to healthcare **often operate in isolation.**
- **Lack of capacity building** of Asha and Anganwadi working in ICDS centre.

Way Forward

Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere & to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition requires not only coordinated efforts but also funds to deliver services to the vulnerable sections of India.

7. Need of introspection among Media professionals

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS 3- Role of media in internal security challenges

Synopsis: Media professionals need to introspect. Action against someone spreading fake news cannot be portrayed as a threat to freedom of the press.

Introduction

Fake news causes social disturbance not only in India but globally. One false news item can spark panic and even violence in society. Media is the fourth pillar of democracy, and it is their duty to be the upholders of free speech, honesty, and civil discourse.

Background:

The peaceful farmers' protest turned violent on January 26. Protestors changed the specified route for tractor march and went to Red fort. They hoisted a flag that was not tricolor.

- One of the **protestor died due to overturning of the tractor.** However, some media and political representatives claimed that **he died due to police shooting.**
- This **fake news was broadcasted** which incited violence. Half- hearted apologies were made later.
- Several FIRs have been filed against media personalities for spreading fake news. Now, it is being claimed as an attack on free speech and liberty.

Why should the media introspect?

It is the fundamental rule of journalism to verify the news before sharing it but no such verification was done.

1. **First,** there are many adverse consequences of spreading fake news. For example, it helps the nations who want to show India in poor light.
2. **Second,** fake news undermines the credibility of the beneficiary. For example, fake news in support of farmer's protests will only undermine their struggle.
3. **Third,** these professionals speak about media freedom, but only they choose to speak for themselves. They have alienated the common citizens and vernacular media.
4. **Fourth,** Using freedom of speech to cover every mistake makes the freedom redundant. Making mistakes once in a while is human but making errors daily and deleting them makes the intent suspicious.
5. **Fifth,** journalists also have a duty towards the nation which comes along with the right to free speech.

What should be done?

Media needs to introspect about the fake news within their space. Any action against an individual fake news spreader cannot be showcased as freedom of press is under threat.

- **First, Institutions must introspect** and have the ability to self-correct. Many healthy institutions display this characteristic.
- **Second, a proper investigation** would be a learning for celebrity journalists that they too are subject to the law of the land.

8. 'Smart walls' for Indian borders

Synopsis: Concept of smart walls has been introduced in the US. India should also explore the possibilities of using smart walls to protect borders.

Syllabus – GS- 3 – Internal Security – Border management

Introduction

US president has stopped the construction of a "border wall" between the U.S. and Mexico. However, a new 'smart' wall will be placed on the borders, as an alternative.

The concept of a smart wall is not new. It was proposed under Trump administration to complement the physical barriers on the border.

What is a smart wall?

A 'smart' wall would use advanced surveillance technology instead of the physical wall and armed patrols.

It would make use of the following technologies to detect and stop border infiltration:

- For surveillance on the border, it would use radar satellites, computer-equipped border-control vehicles, control sensors, and underground sensors.
- Thermal imaging would be added for detection.

This technology is so precise that it can distinguish between animals, humans, and vehicles. Then, it will send updates to the forces.

Is this technology useful in India?

1. India is sharing a border with **a difficult neighborhood**. It is facing challenges of **terrorists and smugglers infiltrating** into the country. But due to the rugged topography on the borders, erection of fences or any physical structures have not been successful.
2. Smart walls can be useful as their systems can be easily used on rugged topographies. Moreover, these technologies are cost-effective, less harmful to the environment, and require a lesser amount of land.
3. Even if it is not feasible to cover all our borders under this technology, it can strengthen over existing border security infrastructure.

Thus, with the increasing tensions on the border of India, exploring such technologies would strengthen India's security on borders.

9. A normal budget for abnormal times

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS-3- Government Budgeting

Synopsis: The recently released budget appears to be fairly normal. Normal is not sufficient for abnormal times like the present.

Introduction

The economy contracted by 7.7% in India. The economic survey projects India's real GDP growth to be 11% in 2021-22. However, this projection looks overestimated. India will have to surpass pre-covid-19 levels to achieve this growth; this will take at least two years.

- The budget required non-standard policy responses given the abnormal times for the economy. However, no such major changes were made to the budget.
- There is only a 1% increase in the overall expenditure of the government.

What are the issues in the budget?

First, the increase in capital expenditure is expected to be channelized through Investment in infrastructure, However, it is linked with 2 types of risks;

- If there is a delay in the completion of projects, it will lead to more spending.

- It will not provide instant multiplier effects to lift the demand. As the life cycle of these projects is very long.

Second, there are no drastic reforms for the agriculture sector. For example, no announcements of rationalizing of the Public Distribution System issue prices of food grains.

- The cash transfers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme (PM-KISAN) have not been increased.

Third, manufacturing growth would **depend totally on private investments**.

- **There is lack of concrete policies** towards export promotion in the textile sector. This can undermine the competitiveness of manufacturing exports.

Fourth, infrastructure provisioning has unaddressed issues such as execution risk and regulatory issues. The introduction of a development finance institution addresses only one issue.

Fifth, there is no proper plan to tackle urban unemployment. Employment and demand generation will depend on the impulses of growth cycles.

The target of reducing the fiscal deficit from 9.5% to 6.8% of GDP **depends upon hypothetical factors, such as**:

- Total revenue might get some boost from better tax revenue.
- A renewed hope for better divestment revenues.

Although the Budget fixed some grand targets, it did not provide the precise mechanisms to achieve those.

10. Twitter might face penal action under IT Act

Source – The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 3 – Challenges to internal security through communication networks, the role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cybersecurity; money-laundering and its prevention

Synopsis- Twitter unilaterally restored accounts despite government order for blocking.

Background

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT ordered Twitter to block more than 250 tweets/Twitter accounts. The order was issued for making fake, intimidating, and provocative tweets.
- The development came in the wake of violence in Delhi on January 26 during a tractor parade of farmers, protesting against the three farm bills.
- Accounts included were linked to an influential magazine, members of an opposition party, and the protest movement such as Kisan Ekta Morcha.
- Many accounts were blocked after the order. However, the majority of them have been restored.

Under which Act Twitter was ordered to withhold the accounts?

Section 69(A) of the IT Act 2000 empowers the government to order an intermediary to block online content. The grounds for such order include sovereignty and integrity of India, defense of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states or public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offense.

It is the same section, under which Chinese Apps have been banned in India. The content attached to the said hashtag had been found to be directly falling under Section 69A of the IT Act. Twitter may face penal action for not complying with directions issued.

This section has been criticized for the secrecy of its process. However, in Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015) SC upheld the validity of this section.

Way forward

The government's stand on farmer's protest is debatable. However, the inflammatory content and Incitement to genocide cannot be interpreted as freedom of speech as it is a threat to law and order.

This situation may lead to a face-off between the tech giant and the government.

11. Hurdles in the path of doubling farmer's income

Source- Down To Earth

Syllabus– GS 3 – Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country– different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Synopsis – Doubling farmer's income by 2022 is too ambitious target for the government.

Background-

- In 2016, the Government has set a target of doubling farmers' income by the year 2022.
- Doubling farmer's income [real income not the nominal income] till 2022-23 over the base year of 2015-16, requires annual growth of 10.41 percent in farmers' income.
- However, there is no roadmap or action plan to achieve this over-ambitious goal.

What are the constraints in the path of doubling the income of farmers?

The target of doubling farmer's income by 2022 seems too ambitious due to the following issues-

1. **First, data related challenges.** There is no official data on farmers' incomes after 2015-16. There is no report card of the current income levels of the farmers and no plan to achieve this target.
2. **Second,** no implementation level plan. ICAR prepared a plan for each state for doubling farmer's income. But no details were available on how states are going to implement the plan or how the government will analyze the progress.
   - **For Example- In 2017,** ICAR decided to adopt and develop two villages as models in each district of the country, so that state governments can follow. But it is found that there is no progress on this plan.
3. **Three,** many important schemes, such as **crop insurance, interest subvention subsidy, and even PM-KISAN are facing stagnation or decline in allocation under budget 2021.** Even Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana received a lower allocation than last year.
4. **Fourth,** the procurement of wheat and paddy has gone up. But, it is only benefitting few states like Punjab, Haryana, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh.
5. **Fifth,** the agriculture credit portfolio is not equally distributed across the states and across farmers within the state.

Way forward

- The problem with respect to Agriculture in India is deep-rooted. It requires systemic solutions with a well-thought-out strategy and policy reforms.
- ICAR should develop models of farming system by combining all their technologies in a package with focus on farm income.
- Increase in crop intensity and diversification towards high value crops is also the key.

12. New Farm Laws and Labour Codes is the way forward

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3 Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

Synopsis: The agriculture and labour reforms passed recently creates a condition for productivity and enhance growth. This benefits millions of small farmers and unorganised workers.

Farm Laws and the changes it brings:

In India, Farmers earn less than people engaged in the services sector. This difference is not common in all countries.

- An RBI study shows that a potato farmer only gets 28 per cent of the amount paid by the consumer. Across all crops, the farmgate price (the net price of the product when it leaves the farm) is 40-60 per cent less than the consumer price.

How the earlier existing laws were problematic to farmers? How the new farm laws are of help?

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The Green Revolution and subsidies have expanded India's agricultural production. But the farmers have not gained. This is because the mediators have taken 40-60 per cent of the profit. The problems with the earlier laws are,

- **First, the stock limits mentioned in the Essential Commodities Act.** The Act mention a certain amount of stocks to be maintained to satisfy the food security needs of India. This restricted large-scale processing units from running at full capacity. This led to the problem of **food wastage.**
  - 30-40 per cent of vegetables and fruits are lost due to inadequate storage, processing and transportation facilities.
  - **New Farm Law (The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020):** The Act **removed the stock limits and introduction of the contract farming act.** This **will bring in new investments** to tap the wasted resource.
- **Second, earlier under the APMC Act**, only traders registered in APMCs can buy farmers' produce. This restricted the outsiders and favoured registered intermediaries. Intermediaries used this to make a profit instead of farmers.
  - **New Farm Law (The Farmers' Produce Trade And Commerce (Promotion And Facilitation) Act, 2020):** The new laws amend this provision that favoured the intermediaries. Farmers now will have an option. **Either sell to the traders registered or to the outsiders.**
  - Now private market/non-APMCs registered trader can also set up an agricultural market and compete with APMCs registered intermediaries.
  - **For example, Karnataka implemented the Uniform Market** portal in 2014, enabling trade across taluka APMC limits without APMC fees. This increased farmer's profit.

Labour reforms and the changes it brings:

- Parliament has passed 3 labour code bills aimed at labour welfare reforms. These codes cover more than 50 crores unorganized and organized workers in India. This also includes platform or gig workers also. These three codes were

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1. Industrial Relations Code, 2020

2. Code on Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2020
3. Social Security Code, 2020.

First, multiple labour laws have not encouraged employment creation. These laws have created hindrances for job creation due to the high costs of compliance. For example, India's employment elasticity with respect to GDP growth is 0.2. China and Bangladesh have an elasticity of 0.44. And 0.38 respectively.

- **New Labour Codes:** India's labour reforms will promote growth with higher employment elasticity. This is because these codes are the simplified comprising of many prior labour laws.

What is employment elasticity?
Employment elasticity is a measure of how employment varies with economic output. For example, An employment elasticity of 1 implies that with every 1 percentage point growth in GDP, employment increases by 1%.

- **Second, the old labour laws protected existing jobs** at the cost of preventing new job creation.
  - **New codes:** The new codes would incentivise the firms to create new jobs. It is also in line with the reforms being undertaken by our neighbouring countries.
  - **For example, Bangladesh increased formal jobs** by legalising fixed-term employment and banning union activity in FDI industries. It raised the threshold for seeking prior permission for laying off workers.

Suggestions to improve further:

- India should bring in economic reforms. **Aadhaar-enabled social safety nets** and direct income transfer to the poor will pay off by enabling growth with a massive expansion in employment.
- **The social safety nets have been created to ensure the right to food** and direct income transfers to farmers. This will protect incomes of the vulnerable even as competition increases productivity and growth.
- **The government should continuously communicate with those unhappy** with the reforms. The government should explain how the current status quo is hurting farmers and informal workers.

13. Concerns regarding DNA Technology (Use and Application) Bill, 2019

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3: concern associated with technologies.

Synopsis: DNA Technology (Use and Application) Bill, 2019 has many concerns over its use when implemented. So, it is necessary to debate the effects before finalizing the Bill.

Background

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science, Technology, Environment, Forests, and Climate Change was tasked to review the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Bill, 2019**.
- In its final report, it acknowledged that the use of technologies in the criminal justice system is important. Yet, it cautioned that it should not violate the **constitutional right of privacy.**
- The report has also raised concerns over the **creation of a national database of genetic profiles** gathered at crime scenes.

What are the concerns raised by the committee?

The committee has raised the following concerns in **The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Bill, 2019**. These concerns need to be debated extensively in the parliament before the finalization of the bill.

1. **First,** many countries in the world collect Genetic Information of Persons unrelated to the crime. It is a violation of their Privacy.
   - Prosecution agencies collect flakes of skin, strands of hair, drops of blood and saliva from the crime scene. This helps the Prosecution agencies to validate the identity of an individual.
   - However, many times the footprints collected at a crime scene may not necessarily be of those individuals associated with the incident.
   - Hence, the **DNA repository** proposed by the Bill should exclude the information of the people who have nothing to do with the crime.
2. **Second,** a lack of infrastructure will lead to undesired outcomes.
   - India is lacking the infrastructure for conducting DNA tests in the country. According to the C**ommittee**, the labs in the country can fulfill only 2-3 percent of the country's **DNA profiling.**
3. **Third,** India's criminal justice system is not ready for the use of DNA technology. Already, India's justice system lacks a legal aid system especially for the marginalized sections of society.
   - Most people charged with criminal offenses, are not aware of their rights. This deficit will widen when technology, such as DNA profiling, is deployed to establish crime.
   - Also, proper training is required for educating a range of criminal justice functionaries. (police, lawyers, magistrates). Then only this technology can be used effectively.

The parliament before deciding the features of the DNA Technology Bill should recall **the** verdict **in Malak Singh v State of Punjab**. Then supreme court Judge **O Chinnappa Reddy** remarked that, though organised crime needs close surveillance it may not be permitted as it infringes the **fundamental right to personal liberty**.

14. Bad Banks – pros and cons

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Synopsis: The centre is proposing to set up Bad Banks or Asset Reconstruction Company to acquire bad loans from banks.

Introduction

There is a persisting issue of bad loans in the Indian banking sector and the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown even worsened the situation. Setting up the bad Banks will help the Banking sector in dealing with this crisis.

International Experience of bad bank

- It helps in **combining all bad loans** of banks **under a single exclusive entity**. Countries like the US, Germany, and Japan have used this concept.
- **The US implemented the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP)** after the 2008 financial crisis. It was moulded around the idea of a bad bank. The US Treasury earned nominal profits under the TARP.

What are the problems with a bad bank?

According to the former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan, transferring bad assets from one pocket of the government to another will not lead to success. The reasons are,

1. **First,** bad banks are backed by the government. The government will pay the high cost for stressed assets (to make bad bank profitable). It is **not good for the fiscal health of the country**.
2. **Second,** there is a bad loan crisis in PSUs because they are managed by **the bureaucrats. Bureaucrats** are not like private banks and **cannot offer the same commitment to lenders** and ensure profitability. If a Bad bank is allowed to manage by bureaucrats, then there is no point to create a bad bank at all.
3. **Third, bad banks do not address the root problem**. The reason behind the bad loan accumulation is the lack of **focus on the quality** of credit provided by banks. Establishing a bad bank might create a mindset that there is a system in place to recover the loans. This can lead to careless lending by banks in a larger manner and worsen the present bad loan crisis.

Will bad banks help in reviving the credit flow in the economy?

Some experts believe a bad bank can help free capital of over ₹5 lakh crore that is locked in by banks as provisions against these bad loans. This will give banks the freedom to use the freed-up money to give more loans.

- This gives the impression that banks have **unused funds lying in their balance sheets**. They could use these funds only if they could get rid of their bad loans.
- Many public sector banks may be considered to be **technically broke**. In reality, Their liabilities are far exceeding the assets they have. So, a bad bank could help them reduce their liabilities by purchasing bad loans.

The way forward

- A new bad bank set up by the government can improve banks capital safeguards by freeing up capital. It could help banks feel more confident to start lending again.

15. Gandhian imprint in the farmer's protest

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus:

GS 4 – Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and the world.

GS 3 – Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System-objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping.

Synopsis: The protesting farmers are going through physical and mental suffering in Delhi's severe winter. But the Government and the urban middle classes do not seem to feel a sense of discomfort.

Background

- Gandhiji always backed non-violent methods of protest. Gandhiji also believed rural economy based mass movement follow non-violent methods. This is evident in the incident when he cancelled the Non-Cooperation Movement after Chauri Chura incident.
- Today also, India is facing a rural economy based mass movement, following the principle of non-violence (Farmers protest). But the government and supporters of the farm laws are not respecting the non-violence.
- Scholars, columnists and advisers supporting the laws are of the view that farmers who are protesting are being misled and do not represent the farming community as a whole.

What steps should the government take to end the farmers protest amicably?

- **First, Persuasion approach-** Persuading farmers about the benefits and other important efforts towards farmer's welfare can end the protest.

- **Second, Dialogue between equals-** The Government should reach the farmers for negotiation as an equal partner.
- **Third, Removal of stereotypical perception-** The urban educated class has certain stereotypes about farmers. These stereotypes have to be removed during negotiations. According to urban educated class:
  - Farmers do not know their own benefits due to the general ignorance and lack of education.
  - The farming community is simple-minded and therefore can be easily misled.

How the farmer's protest and the Gandhian principles are relatable?

- **First,** the idea of a peaceful protest is a legacy of Gandhi.
- **Second,** the faith in non-violence by the protesting farmers must be respected by the other side (the government).

Thus, according to Gandhiji's view, the protester's willingness to undergo physical or mental sufferings is a means of awakening opposite party's human instincts.

Way Forward

- The government and the urban middle classes need to change their stereotypical perception regarding farmers.
- The government should also consider the suffering [physical as well as mental] of the farmers.

16. Impacts and importance of GDP revised estimates

Source – The Indian Express

Syllabus – GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Synopsis – Revised estimates of GDP have been released. It would impact the growth prediction and levels of the future National Income.

Introduction

- Last week all major financial publications were released i.e. economic survey, budget, and 1st bi-monthly monetary policy review.
- However, the first revised estimate of GDP growth in 2019-20 was not highlighted.
- This revision has not only revised the 2019-20 GDP growth rate, but also the GDP growth rate for 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- Accordingly, GDP estimates for **2019-20 have been revised from 4.2% to 4 percent**. For 2017-18 revision is from 7% to 6.8% and for 2018-19 it is from 6.1% to 6.5%.

What are the key takeaways from GDP revision?

- **First**, There have been many revisions of GDP estimates. The growth rate is still not certain. For example, for 2016-17 the GDP growth rate went up from 7.1%, as per the First Advance Estimates, to 8.3% in the final analysis.
- **Second,** Revision in 2019-20 figures is important for the base year effect. Due to COVID-19 disruptions in 2020-21, the GDP figures of 2019-20 becomes important for the comparison. Lower estimates in 2019-20, can result in higher figures of 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- **Third,** India's GDP growth rate already going downwards from 2016 i.e. following an inverted-V shape. The COVID-19 pandemic brought that to a complete halt. Thus, a "V-shaped" recovery, which is being talked about by the expert is meaningless. For an actual recovery, the gains should first surpass the level of 2019-20.

Way forward-
The pandemic did not change the growth trajectory [it was already going down], it only made the decline even more precipitous.

17. Fragility of Himalayan Mountain Ecosystem
Source: Down to Earth , The Hindu
Syllabus: GS 3- Conservation, Environmental Pollution, and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.
Synopsis: The recent **Glacial outburst** in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district is a consequence of human's impact on climate and lack of awareness towards **local ecology.**

Background
- Recently a glacier collapsed in Uttarakhand's **Nanda Devi.** According to some satellite images, the glacier collapsed as a result of a **landslide**. It resulted in **flash floods** in the **Rishiganga and Dhauliganga** rivers.
- It claimed many lives (including workers of the two **hydropower projects**).
- Although the **ITBP** through immediate action, rescued nearly 15 people. Many people are still missing.

How Climate change is impacting the Mountain ecosystem and how it is impacting Human livelihood?
1. Anthropogenic activities are continuously affecting the earth's climate. The change in the Mountain ecosystem is an indicator of that effect.
2. Mountain ecosystems are highly vulnerable to climate change owing to their altitude, slope, and orientation to the sun.
3. Due to increased global warming, mountains' glaciers are melting at unprecedented rates. It is reducing the area for the survival of flora and fauna.
   - For example, satellite observations reveal that across India, China, Nepal, and Bhutan, the **melting of glaciers has doubled since the start of the 21st century.**
4. The melting of glaciers threatens water sustainability for hundreds of millions of people in counties, including India. These impacts become severe due to the increase in pressure on water resources for irrigation and food production, industrialization, and urbanization.

What are the reasons for climatic disaster in Uttarakhand?
The frequent disasters in Uttarakhand are not only caused by nature but also due to an indiscriminate increase in hydropower projects.
- Uttarakhand mountain ecosystem faces various threats such as **seismicity, dam-induced micro seismicity**, landslides. For example, the entire State of Uttarakhand falls under Zone-IV and V of the **earthquake risk map of India.**
- Besides being an earthquake-prone zone, it is also prone to Flood disasters. Bursting of **glacial lakes** can cause **flash floods** with catastrophic consequences. **For instance,** moderate earthquakes in the **Tehri dam caused** the 2013 floods in Kedarnath.
- Despite all these threats, the Uttarakhand government has indiscriminately pursued a greater number of **hydropower projects**. For example, the ongoing **Tapovan power project.**
- Also, India has heavily invested in dam development and the growth of hydropower in the Himalayas' region to cut **carbon emissions**.

- For example, if the national plan to construct dams in 28 river valleys in the hills is completed, the Indian Himalayas will have one dam for every 32 km. (The highest density in the world).
- Apart from this, the life of dams is often exaggerated without taking a proper account of the siltation level in the dams. For example, in the **Bhakra dam in Himachal Pradesh**, the siltation was higher by 140% than calculated.

These hydropower projects are incompatible with the local environment and ecology. They have increased the risk of disaster manifolds impacting the life and livelihood of millions of people.

What is the way forward?

- The government should realize the fragility of the Himalayan mountain's ecosystems. Governments need to re-prioritize their projects based on the potential of the mountains, local and traditional knowledge as well as the aspirations of the place.
- Hydro projects should be confined to the areas with the least impact in the Himalayas. Also, the government needs to build more low-impact run-of-the-river power projects rather than building destructive large dams and reservoirs.
- Projects that are incompatible with the local environment and ecology should not be promoted just by giving due consideration to development or economic growth.

18. Issues of restricting free speech in the name of fake news

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges

Synopsis: MHA has recommended criminalizing the spread of misleading news about vaccines. This step would have many repercussions.

Introduction

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued a recommendation letter to all state governments. In that, the MHA mentioned that state governments can pursue criminal action against individuals and organisations for spreading misleading rumours about the vaccine's efficacy.

This recommendation has been issued as per the provision of **the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005** and **the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860**.

It has again raised the issue of curtailing free speech under the cover of fake news.

Restrictions on Free Speech in India

- According to the constitution, the right to free speech can only be restricted on the basis of valid grounds listed under Article 19(2). Grounds are- interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality.
- The SC has also stated that the grounds of restrictions on free speech must be inspected thoroughly. Vague and overbroad grounds are **unconstitutional.**

What can be the potential outcomes of the suggestion given by MHA?

The orders by MHA will give the police unrestricted freedom to detain and prosecute individuals for raising questions about government actions. For instance, some state governments used state regulations under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and DMA to criminalise fake news and unnecessary information during the lockdown.

There were many examples in the past about its potential outcomes. They are

1. **First, the CPA** (Criminal Justice and Police Accountability) **Project's study** found that many FIRs had been registered across Madhya Pradesh for spreading rumours about

COVID-19. In one instance, FIR registered against an individual who declared **support for Tablighi Jamaat on WhatsApp.**

2. **Second, Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) report** has documented 55 cases of targeting the journalists during the lockdown. State governments have prosecuted people for reporting on the mishandling of the pandemic, corruption, and the lack of state support for migrant workers.

What should the government have done instead?

Public trust in the government during a crisis depends upon transparency and not on criminal prosecution. So the government should avoid use of laws to suppress the critics.

- The democratic government needs to be **effectively transparent and accountable.**
- The government can involve in scientific **responses to valid criticism and unscientific misconceptions.** This will build strong public opinion and support for the government.

Conclusion

The government violates the principle of informed consent. There is also a failure to communicate necessary information to the public which is important for healthcare. The government needs to work on it.

19. FSSAI caps Trans Fat in Food

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS -3

Synopsis: FSSAI has released new directions for Trans fat elimination. What would be its possible benefits?

Introduction

India is going to join a select group of countries by limiting industrial trans fat to 2% by mass of the total oils/fats present in the product in 2022. India would be achieving the WHO target a year in advance.

- The trans fat content limit was reduced to 5% from 10% in 2016**. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) limited it to 3% by 2021.**
- **32 countries already have some form of mandatory limits on trans fat** according to a 2020 report of WHO.
- The main aim is to restrict the use of industrially produced trans-fat for increasing the **shelf life of products at less cost. However,** trans-fats are also present naturally in red meat and dairy products**.**

Read – After oils, FSSAI caps Trans Fatty Acids(TFAs) in foods|ForumIAS Blog

What is the reason behind reducing trans fat content in oils?

The government's notification applies to edible oils and fats, that are used as ingredients. It also applies to emulsions such as **margarine**.

- **First,** Targetting these specific ingredients only will reduce the trans fat content to 2% in all food items. These are major sources of industrial trans fat.
- **Second,** edible oils and fats are the major sources of industrial trans fat. **Repeated heating at a high temperature can increase the trans fat** content even when the oil contains less than 2% trans fat.
- **Third**, the trans fat content in food can negatively change the lipoprotein cholesterol profile. It increases the level of bad cholesterol (LDL) and decreases the level of HDL or good cholesterol. It results in an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases.

The way forward

- The benefits of reducing trans fat can be seen in Denmark. It saw a reduction of about 14 deaths related to cardiovascular diseases per 1,00,000 population three years after the Trans-Fat cap.
- Large food companies are already committed to eliminate industrially-produced trans fat from all their products by 2023. For them, matching the FSSAI standard is a matter of concern. Large companies should aim to achieve this.

20. Privacy Issues in government-backed Apps

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus– GS 3 – Awareness in the fields of IT, space, computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights IPR.

Synopsis- Data privacy issues related to government technology platforms and their possible solutions.

Background-

- Recently, WhatsApp has rollbacked their privacy policy after facing a huge backlash from users. Many users started switching to competitor apps such as Signal and Telegram.
- This shows that Indian consumers are becoming more aware and concerned about data privacy.
- However, since the first COVID lockdown, at least 35 mobile apps have been launched across India. All these apps specifically address COVID-19 related information. But the privacy issues in these apps have not been addressed.

What are the challenges with government technology platforms?

1. **First, Government monopoly** – Governments typically have a monopoly in providing public services. Thus, porting out or digital migration is not possible in that case. For example, there is no alternative to Aadhar, Aarogya setu app.
2. **Second, lack of consistency**– Most of the COVID-19 apps launched by State governments have lacked consistency in terms of the features, functionalities, and information updates. This is due to the reason that updation of data in government tech platforms carried out manually.
3. **Third,** Data privacy is also a cause of concern in many of these government applications. **For example-** Most of the apps are only informative and intended to issue advisories. But they have sought permissions for location, photos, storage, and camera.
4. **Fourth,** most of these apps failed to meet the **necessity and proportionality principle** of data privacy.

    - **Necessity-** According to this principle, data must be adequate, relevant, and limited to the purpose for which they are processed. In simple words, is the data necessary for the mobile application to achieve its goal?
    - **Proportionality-** If the action must be sanctioned by law, then it must have a legitimate aim. Apart from that, there must be procedural guarantees against any abuses also.

What needs to be done to improve government technology platforms?

1. **First,** The government should **work on a collective database structure** by combining two or more state/organisation's apps. This can prevent multiple unwanted permission requests in apps and can also address data privacy issues. For example, integrating Aarogya Setu app with the State mobile apps to provide integrated service.

2. **Second, the government can follow a decentralized approach.** Many European countries are moving towards a decentralized system for contact tracing apps. These apps offer greater protection against abuse and misuse of people's data compared to centralized apps. This is because,
    - The chances of data abuse and misuse are less because information resides in many individual systems and not in a centralized system.
3. **Third**, clear **regulation on government technology platforms.** This can contribute to improve public services and also improve public trust in the government's technology initiatives.
4. **Fourth**, **structured audit on government-backed technological initiatives**. The negatives can be rectified and improve public services. The positives, on the other hand, will boost the government as a potential service provider.

Way forward

State governments' launched mobile apps have proved that the government has the capacity to deliver technology services to people. But it needs a little course correction to improve public confidence.

21. Privatisation of banking sector: Issues and analysis

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS -3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Synopsis: The government has decided to privatise two public sector banks. The move will give the private sector a key role in the banking sector.

Introduction

The government has announced the disinvestment policies for four strategic sectors including banking, insurance, and financial services. The government will have a **bare minimum presence** in these sectors.

- Earlier, the government merged ten PSU banks into four.
- **The government is now left with 12 state-owned banks**, from 28 earlier.
- The government will select 2 banks for privatization, **based on the NITI Aayog's recommendations.** These recommendations will be considered by a core group of secretaries on disinvestment.

What were the reasons for the nationalization of Private banks?

In the Mid-1960s, the commercial banking sector was most profitable, especially after the consolidation of 566 banks in 1951 to 91 in 1967. However, some issues were present in these sectors at that time:

- Branches were mostly opened in the urban areas. Rural and semi-urban areas were not served by commercial banks.
- Banks were not willing to take any social responsibilities. They were more concerned with the profits and afraid to diversify their loan portfolios.
- Nationalisation was done with an intention to align the banking sector with a socialistic approach of the government.

Thus, from 1969, the process of nationalization of the 14 largest private banks started.

Why government is privatizing the PSBs?

However, at present, PSBs are suffering from many issues:

- **First**, Public Sector Banks continue to have high Non-Performing Assets and stressed assets as compared to private banks.

- **Second,** banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses after the Covid-related regulatory relaxations have been lifted. As a result, **the government would need to inject funds into weak public sector banks.**
- **Third**, **Governance reforms have not been able to improve** the financial position of public sector banks.

The profitability, market capitalization, and dividend payment record of PSBs are not improving, despite efforts of reform by the government.

How are the private banks performing currently?

- Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36% in 2020, while public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% in 2020 (from 74.28% in 2015).
- **They are expanding their market share** through new products, technology, and better services. They have attracted better valuations in stock markets.
  - For example, HDFC Bank has a market capitalization of Rs 8.80 lakh crore while SBI commands just Rs 3.50 lakh crore.
- **However, in private sector also,** everything is not well. CEOs of ICICI and Yes bank are facing the investigation for doubtful loans and other illegal activities. Lakshmi Vilas Bank merged with DBS Bank of Singapore after operational issues.
- Moreover, an Asset quality review of banks in 2015, found that **many private sector banks were under-reporting NPAs.**

Thus, the privatization drive this time should be thoughtful. Lessons should be learnt from the past. An adequate mechanism to ensure accountability must be established in the commercial banking sector.

22. Challenges related to regulations of Crypto currencies in India

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3. Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Synopsis: The government should ensure a smart regulation of cryptocurrencies instead of putting a ban on them.

Background

The government has given a statement to bring a law on cryptocurrencies. It is a positive step considering the fact that there is a doubt about the legality of cryptocurrencies in India.

- The doubt exists despite the government has suggested that it **does not consider cryptocurrency to be a legal tender.**
- The reason behind this disapproval is that such **currencies are highly volatile, used for illegal Internet transactions**.
- Also, these currencies cannot be regulated as it is completely lying outside the domain of the state.

RBI's decision on cryptocurrencies

- The RBI sent a circular to banks and asked them **not to provide services to those trading in cryptocurrencies in 2018.**
- However, **the Supreme Court found the circular to be disproportionate.** This is for the reason that the virtual currencies were not banned in India.
- **RBI was not able to provide strong evidence** that units regulated by RBI were harmfully impacted by the exchanges dealing in virtual currencies.

What are the challenges in regulating cryptocurrencies in India?

The Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur highlighted the difficulty in the regulation of cryptocurrencies.

- **Regulatory bodies** like RBI and SEBI etc. **don't have a legal framework** to directly regulate cryptocurrencies.

- **Cryptocurrencies are difficult to regulate** as they are neither currencies nor assets or securities or commodities issued by an identifiable user.
- **Cryptocurrencies have a growing client base** in India despite having legal uncertainty. Their attraction may only grow now as Bitcoin has hit new peaks in price and is gaining influential followers such as Tesla founder Elon Musk.

Suggestions on cryptocurrency:

- **Smart Regulation of the cryptocurrency is a much better option** than getting banned directly. Because a ban on blockchain-based technology (having scattered record) cannot be implemented practically.
  - For example, China has banned cryptocurrencies and has a controlled internet; even then trading in cryptocurrencies were happening in a small amount.
- The inter-ministerial committee has **recommended an outright ban.** On the other hand, it highlighted the **need for an official digital currency** and for the promotion of the underlying blockchain technology. So, the government **can ban** the cryptocurrency and **release an official digital currency**.

The way forward

The government must resist the idea of a ban and push for smart regulation.

23. Disinformation issue in Cyber Space: Issues and Way forward

Source – The Hindu

Syllabus – GS 3 – Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cybersecurity; money-laundering and its prevention.

Synopsis – Society needs protection from **disinformation.** The best approach to deal with it, is to take advantage of the mechanisms already developed for cyber-security.

Cyber-attack and disinformation

- Cyber-attacks are aimed at computer infrastructure, while disinformation exploits inherent cognitive biases and logical fallacies.
- Cyber-attacks are executed using viruses, botnets, and social engineering. Disinformation attacks use manipulated information through deep fakes, and cheap fakes.
- Cyber-attacks and disinformation attacks have always been handled individually. But it is time to accept that disinformation is a cyber-security issue.

What is Cognitive Hacking?

Cognitive hacking is an attack that seeks to manipulate the perception of people by taking advantage of their psychological vulnerabilities. The purpose of the attack is behavioural changes, induced through exposure to disinformation.

- **Examples** of Cognitive hacking- unfounded concern were induced about **US 2020 presidential election fraud by disinformation**.

How DDoS and disinformation are linked?

1. A **Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS)** attacks target websites and online services. The aim is to flood them with more traffic than the server or network can handle. It prevents the completion of legitimate requests and disrupts the services.
2. Similarly, a well-coordinated disinformation campaign floods disinformation to an extent that people start to deny the truth.
3. Disinformation is used as psychological manipulation of people into performing an action on a mass scale.

Countermeasure for disinformation attacks

The cyber-security experience can be used to **develop disinformation defense systems** to mitigate disinformation risks.

- **First,** this can be done by analyzing the tactics of disinformation. It helps to understand the identities of malicious actors, their activities, and behaviors from the cyber-security domain.
- **Second, Layered Security-** Mechanisms such as **Defence-in-Depth** can be used to mitigate disinformation threats. A series of proactive filters are required to filter out the fake information.
  - Authenticity at the time of login should be the first layer. If the disinformation is still posted, Human and AI can be used for its detection.

Defense in Depth (DiD) is an approach to cyber-security. In it, a set of defensive mechanisms are layered to secure valuable data and information. If one system fails, another steps up immediately to thwart an attack. For example, Firewall is the first layer, antivirus is the 2nd, Regular patching is the 3rd layer.

- **Third, an Information sharing framework** like ISACs is required to **collect and exchange information** about the identity, content, actions, and behaviors of disinformation actors.

Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC) – An industry-specific organization that collects and shares information on cyber threats to critical infrastructure.

Way forward

- The technology sector, civil society, and the government should collaborate to make consumers aware of cyber-attacks.
- Media should be used for spreading awareness among common people.
- Taking advantage of existing cybersecurity frameworks, norms, and tactics is the optimum way to meet this threat.

24. Reasons and Solutions for disaster management in Uttarakhand

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3: Disaster and Disaster Management

Synopsis: There are various reasons behind disasters in Uttarakhand. It can be prevented by taking some long-term measures.

Background:

- The **glacier burst** in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand caused the flash **floods.** It led to the death of 34 people with more than 170 people missing.
- Apart from that, it also caused destruction to public and private infrastructure. For example, it damaged the **NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydropower project** and the **Rishiganga mini-hydro project.**
- The recent disaster reminds the 2013 disaster in Uttarakhand which resulted in the death of thousands of people.
- The scientific community still doesn't have the exact cause of this disaster.

What are the possible causes of the disaster in Uttarakhand?

The scientific community still doesn't have the exact reason for this disaster. However, some possible reasons are discussed below.

- **First,** the Natural ecology of Uttarakhand and its **fragile mountain ecosystem** is prone to such disaster. Uttarakhand is located between the young and unstable mountains. Moreover, intense rainfall makes it more vulnerable.

- **Second,** as per **geologists, glaciologists, and climate experts,** climate change, rapid and indiscriminate construction activities, and the subsequent ecological destruction are disturbing the balance of the ecosystem in this region.
  - For example, **The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report (2019)** had pointed out that one-third of the Hindu Kush Himalaya's glaciers would melt by 2100. It may happen even if all the countries in the region fulfilled their commitments under the **Paris Agreement**.
  - It also warned that any ecologically destructive activities would lead to more intensified disasters like landslides.
- **Third, according to the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology**, rock mass might have weakened due to intense freezing **and thawing of snow**. This may have created a weak zone. Fractures led to a collapse that resulted in flash floods.
- **Fourth,** Experts also opine that **massive deforestation** is a possible reason for the disaster. For example, in 2014, the **Chopra committee** established that the haphazard construction of dams can cause irreversible damage to the region.
- **Fifth,** there are also possibilities that the use of explosives in the construction of dams and other infrastructure would have weakened the rock strata.

What needs to be done?

- **First,** Government should Invest in **long-term crisis response mechanisms and resilience solutions** such as,
  - Flood prevention and rapid response.
  - **R**oad stabilization technologies for fragile road networks, bridges, culverts, and tunnels.
  - **Strengthening embankments** using scientific knowledge.
  - Investing in monitoring and **early warning system.**
  - Investing in training and **capacity building of local communities** to prevent and manage risks effectively.
- **Second,** hydropower and other public infrastructure projects need reassessment based on the sensitivity of local ecology.
- **Third,** implementing pragmatic policies and regulatory guidelines such as responsible **eco- and religious tourism policies**. This will restrict detrimental human activities.
- **Fourth,** applying innovative and inclusive solutions that support nature and marginalized communities, to restore and rebuild a resilient future for Uttarakhand.

25. Mindless development could bring more calamities

Source: Click here

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: Development work in the Himalayas is being carried out without an understanding of its fragility, seismicity, glacial behavior.

Introduction

The flash floods due to the burst of an artificial lake inside Nanda Devi Sanctuary is the newest warning given by the Himalayas to the supporters of development. The losses of lives, property, and projects are estimated at more than Rs. 4,000 crore.

- According to Planet Labs, ice along with frozen mud and rocks fell down from a high mountain inside the Nanda Devi Sanctuary.
- The current winter season has seen less rain and snow, despite highest temperature in the last sex decades. We also witnessed winter forest fires this time. Effects of chemical weathering were much more active in the higher Himalayas. More such events can place this year.

- Rishi Ganga has seen similar devastations in the past. There was a lake burst in Rishi Ganga in 1968. Another lake burst in Rishi Ganga was seen at the time of the 1970 Alaknanda floods.

How have the developmental activities caused troubles in the Himalayan region?
Development activities have increased the destructive powers of the calamities. Less destructive methods, technologies and rules are available but they are not being followed.

- **First**, studies have suggested that **the pace of climate change is faster in mountains** and fastest in the Himalayas. The huge displacement of soil, silt, and stones in the river floor owing to development projects force the raging river to behave differently.
- **Second, the projects have been carried out despite the protests by the local people.**
  - People protested against the Vishnu Ganga project, which was devastated in the 2013 floods and rebuilt.
  - The people of Reni **protested against the Rishi Ganga project as they were aware of the river's flood history.** The Supreme Court and the Uttarakhand High Court gave judgments against the construction of dams in the inner Himalayas.
- **Third,** a slight error in the monsoon forecast alters the preparedness in the region resulting in a severe calamity.
  - In the 2013 calamity, the **India Meteorological Department wrongly announced that the monsoon** will reach Uttarakhand by June 27-28. It reached a week before with 300-400 percent more rain. Thus, the death toll and scale of destruction was record-breaking.
- **Fourth, any hindrance in the river-bed increases the power of the river.** In such a situation, water and silt dominate the surrounding and downstream areas. For example, the VishnuPrayag Project was destroyed by the combined power of Khiron Gad and Pushpawati.
- **Fifth**, the assessment of committees has not been implemented. **The Ravi Chopra committee** formed by the SC recommended the closure of all the 24 hydro projects by the Wildlife Institute of India.
  - Moreover, **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** was a function of independent functionaries. Now this task has been assigned to a government agency.

Way forward
Locals do not want to risk their homes, fields, etc. in the name of development. The Himalayas have been giving us life through water, fertile soil, biodiversity, wilderness, and a feel of spirituality. We cannot and should not try to control or dictate the Himalayas.

26. "First Trade Minimum Price" (FTMP): A model to increase farmer's income

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 3: Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints; E-technology in the aid of farmers**.**
Synopsis: Industrial revolution 4.0, will reduce employment opportunity. The "First Trade Minimum Price" model can be used for increasing farmer's income.

How Industrial Revolutions are changing employment dynamics?

- The subsequent three Industrial revolutions reduced the dominance of the agriculture sector. They made the service and manufacturing sector dominant.

- This forced the agrarian workforce to shift to secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy.
- The advent of the **Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0** will make this situation more complex.
- The use of new technologies in IR 4.0 will lead to job losses in the service and manufacturing sectors. New techs include Artificial Intelligence, robotics, cognitive analytics, 3D printing, genomics.
- Thus, the industries employing a huge population from the agriculture sectors will have a reduced capacity for employment.

Present status of Agriculture sector

- According to **the FAO**, about 60 percent of the global population, directly or indirectly, is still dependent on agriculture.
- However, its contribution to the world GDP is just about 4 percent. Whereas, the contribution of secondary and tertiary sectors to the economy is 90%.
- In India, the contribution of the agriculture sector to GDP is 12-15 percent. Though it is higher than the world average, it is still much less, compared to the contribution from other sectors of the economy.
- Centre and state governments are continuously trying to improve the economic status of the farmers. Yet, their efforts are unable to deliver a sustainable increase in their per capita income.

Thus, there is an urgent need to think about the way to avoid the possible employment crisis of the future. It involves increasing the productivity of the agriculture sector and farmer's income.

What is the method to improve the farmer's income?

The author suggests a **new economic model** for fixing farm prices. If this model gets employed then it will address the issue of the agrarian economy, and will also retain the population in the agriculture sector. Also, it will make agriculture more prosperous by bringing rural average household income closer to those engaged in manufacturing and services sectors.

- The author proposes for "**First Trade Minimum Price" (FTMP)**. According to this model, the local farming community will fix the prices of all the agricultural primary goods on a day-to-day basis or periodically.
- Also, this will make it mandatory for the first trader to procure the commodity at a price, not below the price fixed by the above criterion.
- He also suggests the use of robust digital technologies for the exercise of fixing prices.
- This proposal is based on the present market-based pricing of services and products. Here, the prices of products or services are determined and decided by the manufacturers or providers.
- Similarly, the farming community also can decide the prices of their products. It will increase their per capita income. This will also help to retain the agriculture workforce in the farm sector thereby decreasing the unemployment rate.

27. Why prices of Petrol and Diesel are rising?

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3: Issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment

Synopsis: Retail prices of petrol and diesel have reached record highs in India. One major reason is a heavy tax on Petrol and diesel in India.

Introduction - The price of petrol is touching Rs 89 per litre in Delhi and diesel reaching Rs 86.30 per litre in Mumbai. The government states that the reason behind this rise in price is an increase in global crude prices by more than 50 per cent.
While retail prices of both fuels in other countries are just reaching pre-pandemic levels, Indian consumers are paying a lot more.

Why are consumers in India paying more for petrol and diesel?
Retail petrol and diesel prices are linked to global crude oil prices in theory. That means if crude prices fall, retails prices should come down too, and vice versa. However, this does not happen in reality especially in India.

1. **First,** when global prices go up, the consumer has to pay the increase in price. But when the prices decrease, **the government introduces fresh taxes to ensure that it collects extra revenues.**
   - **For instance**, the government hiked the central excise duty on petrol and diesel at the beginning of 2020 to boost **revenues.** The government did this to boost **economic activity government**. This resulted in the revenue gain to the government.
   - Currently, state and central taxes amount to around 180 per cent of the base price of petrol and 141 per cent of the base price of diesel in Delhi.
2. **Second, crude oil prices collapsed during the pandemic.** But as economies have reduced travel restrictions, global demand has improved, and prices have been recovering.
3. **Third, the controlled production of crude amid rising demand** has been another key factor in boosting oil prices.
4. **Fourth,** Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are free to set prices for petrol and diesel based on international prices on paper. Increase in central levies has meant that **the consumer hasn't benefited from low international prices** and has ended up bearing the cost of rising crude oil prices.

Read How India should end oil age?

Conclusion

- Experts suggest that the impact of rising fuel inflation has been balanced by declining food inflation. However, the consumers with greater expenditure on travel are bearing the higher prices even though the overall inflation reduced down to 4.06 per cent in January.

28. Deregulation of Geospatial Data: Prospects

Source: Indian Express

Gs3: Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life. Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology

Synopsis: Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology deregulated the geo-spatial data and map-making in India.

What is geospatial data?

- Geospatial data is the data about objects, events, or phenomena that are located on the surface of the earth.

Read More about Geospatial data and Geospatial policy

What is the present policy on geospatial data?

- Till recently, the government had a near-monopoly regarding the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data and mapping. This was because of concerns over internal as well as external security threats.

- Only government-run agencies such as the **Survey of India, Defence and Home Ministries** were allowed to use geospatial data.
- Whereas, the private companies needed approval from different departments of the government as well as the defence and Home Ministries. Then only, they were able to collect, create or disseminate geospatial data.
- The lack of private participation led to the underdevelopment of the **Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping**.
- The Kargil war highlighted the dependence on foreign data and the need for indigenous sources of data. Only, after the **Kargil war,** the government heavily invested in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping.

Why has the government deregulated geospatial data?

The government has deregulated the geo-spatial data to achieve the following objectives:

1. **First,** it will help in the timely completion of the project without delay. Over-regulation in the use of geo-spatial data has led to **red-tapism.** It delayed the start of projects for both private and government agencies.
    - The Deregulation now allows the Indian companies to **self-attest** by confirming the government guidelines. This eliminates the need for monitoring by a government agency, thereby improving **ease of doing business**.
2. **Second,** it will help to improve the status of **data deficiency** in the country. Lack of appropriate data impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses.
    - Also, Mapping of a country as large and diverse as India with high accuracy will take decades if it is done only by government agencies.
    - Hence, incentivizing the Indian companies in the geospatial sector and increasing investment from private players in the sector will establish India as a data sufficient country.
3. **Third,** the application of geospatial data has become widespread. It is no more confined to security purpose alone.
    - An increasing number of sectors such as agriculture, environment protection, power, water, transportation, communication, health (tracking of diseases, patients, hospitals etc.) currently rely on this data.
    - Geospatial data is now crucial for the government in planning for infrastructure development, social development, natural calamities etc.
4. **Fourth,** it is also in line with the global consensus for **open access** to geospatial data. Many countries have made their geo-spatial data freely available. The new guidelines will ensure open access, except for sensitive defence or security-related data.

What impact is this expected to have?

1. **First,** deregulation will ensure more This will result in more accurate data available to both the government and private agencies for planning.
2. **Second,** it will promote the setting up of new **Startups** and businesses especially in the sector of e-commerce or geospatial based apps. This will increase employment in these sectors.
3. **Third**, it also promotes the building of **indigenous apps.** For example, an Indian version of Google Maps.
4. **Fourth,** with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects it is also likely to increase in **public-private partnerships.**
5. **Fifth,** it will also boost the economy by attracting investments in the geospatial sector by companies and by an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries.

29. Causes of accidents in firework industry

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3 : Growth, development and employment

Synopsis: Labour reforms and technological advances within the fireworks industry is the need of the hour to minimise the causes of accidents in the firework industry.

Introduction

Thousands of workers in Tamil Nadu's famed fireworks' industry are working in unsafe conditions. It resulted in a series of accidents. Such as

- 20 workers died and 28 injured in the latest accident at a fireworks unit in Virudhunagar. These incidents take place **due to gross violation of norms governing the industry** and human error in handling explosive substances.
- 25 lives were lost in an accident in three fireworks factories in Virudhunagar (9), Cuddalore (9), and Madurai (7) in the past 11 months.
- **After such accidents, only short-term action is taken. It** includes
  - Registration and identification of cases,
  - Arrest the person responsible for an accident
  - Symbolic inspections,
  - Issuance of warnings and safety advisories

What are the causes of such accidents?

- **First,** there is a large-scale **illegal sub-leasing of workers** for licenced firework units.
- **Second, there is a violation of the limit on workers** to be deployed. This leads to crowding in each shed.
- **Third,** there is a **piece-rate system in payment** (payment to workers is provided based on the number of firecrackers produced by workers). People are tempted to produce more units per day. For example, a tired worker hurriedly emptied semi-finished crackers, which caused the recent accident.
- **Fourth,** there is also a **lack of trained workers.** This encouraged the industry to hire new workers with limited skills leading to accidents.
- Fifth, **Unlicensed units have expanded.** They mostly escape the inspection until an accident occurs.

The way forward

- **Supervision of the chemicals** to be mixed or stored is a key task to avoid casualty.
- There should be **periodic inspections** at factories and **strict penal action** against violators.
- Central and State governments must **provide the needed manpower** for enforcement agencies as the industry has grown manifold.
- A **continuous political push for labor reforms** and **technological innovations** within the industry is also essential.

30. Issue of MSP Calculation and farmer's demand

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3 Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices

Synopsis: As per the government, M S Swaminathan report's recommendations on MSP are already implemented. However, protesting farmers and farm experts contest the claim.

Introduction

Protesting farmers and farm experts have contested the government's claim. They say that the government is going by its own formula and farmers' income have not been improved yet.

- The farmers are claiming so because the actual amount depends on the method used to calculate the cost of production.

What are the various formulas used to calculate the cost of production in agriculture?

- There are at least six formulas to make that calculation which include A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2.

Formulas used to determine the cost of production	**Criteria included**
A1 method	**all actual expenses in cash.** Included the value of hiring human resource, the value of owned machine labour, hired machinery charges, the value of seeds both farm produced and purchased, the value of pesticides etc.
A2 method	**A1 plus rent paid for leased-in-land**
B1 method	**A1 and interest on the value of an owned capital asset**
B2 method	**B1 plus the rental value** of owned land and **rent paid for leased**-in-land.
C1 method	**B1** and the credited value of family labour
C2 method	**B2** and the credited with the value of Family Labour

- **M S Swaminathan report** had **recommended** that the MSP should be calculated by including all actual farm costs as **C2 along with an additional 50% margin**.

What formula does the government use, to calculate MSP?

Different formulas were recommended by different committees formed for calculating MSP. For example, Dr M S Swaminathan Committee recommended C2+50%, Ramesh Chand Committee (RCC) recommended MSP on C2+10% formula.

- **First, the government used** its own formula **A2+ Family Labour** as a cost of production. The government then pay farmers 1.5 times the amount of A2+FL. But, the increase in the revenue of farmers did not make any difference in reality.
- **Second,** a comparison with the government method and Swaminathan report shows that there is a **huge difference between A2+FL** (Government) **and C2** (Swaminathan committee) for the main crops. The value of A2+FL is much lower than the C2.
- Even if the costs suggested by RCC are taken into consideration,it can also **improve the welfare of farmers.** But the government is calculating MSP based on their own formula.

The way forward

- Swaminathan report's MSP formula, C2 plus 50% is better for providing farmers with a higher value for their produce.
- Thus, the government should fix MSP by calculating C2, along with an addition of 50% margin. The MSP for wheat would be Rs 2,787 and paddy Rs 3,116 per quintal.
- If the RCC formula (C2 +10%) is adopted, then the MSP should be fixed at Rs 2,044 (wheat) and Rs 2,285 (paddy), respectively

31. Issues in the draft rules for the Code on Social Security 2020

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus – GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Synopsis – The Government drafted the rules for the **Code on Social Security 2020** without considering **growing informal workforce.**

Introduction:

- During the Budget, Finance Minister highlighted the implementation of the four labour codes.
- Budgetary Allocation for the MSME sector this year was Rs.15700 Crores. This is more than double the amount allotted last year.
- This will be a positive step if it provides jobs and social security to informal workers.

What are the positive aspects of the draft labour codes?

1. Social security benefits will extend to gig and platform workers.
2. Minimum wages will apply to all categories of workers. They all will be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).
3. Compliance burden on employers will get reduced. Because the labour codes provide a single registration and licensing instead of multiple ones at present.

Impacts of lockdown on informal workers-

1. The lockdown impacted the informal sector more. This is highlighted by the **Oxfam inequality Virus report.** Few key findings of the report were,
   - **Informal workers were the worst hit**– 75% out of the total 122 million who lost their jobs were in the informal sector.
   - Over **300 informal workers died due to the lockdown** due to starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care.
2. More than **2,582 cases of violation of human rights** were recorded by the National Human Rights Commission as early as April 2020.

What are the issues pertaining to the draft rules for the code on Social security, 2020?

1. **First, Lack of information-** The Draft rules make Aadhaar based registration mandatory for receiving benefits. However, there is not much information available in the registration process.
2. **Second, Confusion regarding applicability**-There is no specific guidelines on how benefits will be applicable to all the informal sector employee.
   - **A question for example-** Will migrant workers qualify for the social security benefits if they employed in a different state than the registered [Aadhaar based] state?
3. **Third, rising inequality gap-** The draft rules are not able to address the issues of the growing informal workforce. The growing informal workforce along with the lack of state's accountability is responsible for rising inequality.
   - Due to this, workers face the risk of human and labour rights violation. It also leads to unsafe and unregulated working conditions and lower wages and other vulnerabilities.

Way forward-

- There is a need to address the growing informal workforce and provide social protection, especially to the 450 million informal sector workers.
- It is important that the draft labour codes take that also into account.

32. Conservation of Migratory Birds

Source- Down To Earth

Syllabus- GS 3 – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Synopsis- Migratory birds are important for ecological balance. However, they are facing several threats, leading to their extinction.

What are migratory birds?

- Bird migration is the regular seasonal movement. Birds fly hundreds and thousands of KMs to find the best habitats for feeding, breeding, and raising their young ones.
- Migratory birds come to India from about 29 countries between September and October during the winter migration season. For example, Pallikaranai in Chennai attracts many flamingoes, ducks, and waders.
- However, India witnessed a decrease in the number of migratory birds.

Threats to Migratory Birds in India

Migratory birds are under threat from the following factors:

1. **Loss of biodiversity-** Over-exploitation, unsustainable use of natural resources, population explosion along with increased weather variabilities, and climate change has resulted in the loss of biodiversity.
2. **Declining water sources**
3. **Illegal killing –** Hunting along migration routes threatens some migratory bird species.
4. **Stopover habitat loss –** Migratory birds use stopover sites to feed, rest and re-energize during their migration period. But many stopover sites are threatened due to increased urbanization and over-exploitation.
5. **Collision** – Structures such as power lines, windmills, and offshore oil-rigs have also affected migratory birds.
6. **Poisoning by pesticides**– Pesticides have an adverse effect on migratory birds as they can directly kill some birds.
7. **Increasing illumination –** The artificial light at night adversely affects migration by confusing the birds.
8. Increasing encroachment and human interferences, lack of food become a challenge, and birds can die of starvation.

Importance of migratory birds

1. Migratory birds play a critical role in maintaining a balance in the ecosystem. They are helpful in pollinating plants, dispersing seeds, act as pest control agents, and consuming insects and small mammals.
2. The absence of these birds from an area can result in disasters like a Locust attack.
3. Duck helps in the transportation of fish eggs in their guts to other water bodies. Bird droppings are rich in Nitrogen and act as organic fertilizers.

What are the measures required to address the issues?

- **Long-term monitoring programs** to assess the migration trends in birds, diseases monitoring and enumeration.
- **Educating** people about bird migrations and their impacts. Seeking local support for nesting and conservation of migratory birds.
- **Fishing operation to be minimized/abandoned/banned** during the migration season.
- Need to create **Bird-friendly landscape** and **maintain natural habitat** to help birds roost and build their nests.
- **Banning single-use plastics** and avoiding dumping of single-use plastics in water bodies.
- Strict law enforcement is required to support the conservation of migratory birds.

- **Modern technologies** like drones can be used to track poachers in areas where birds converge.
- **Minimizing night illumination** along the migration paths.
- **Promote awareness** regarding the conservation and protection of migratory birds and their natural habitats.

33. Importance of Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Synopsis: NASA's Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover touched down on the Martian surface. The results of the experiment will determine the quest for life on Mars and the future manned mission to Mars.

Introduction

Perseverance mission is the most advanced, most expensive, and most sophisticated mobile laboratory sent to Mars. The results will determine the next couple of decades of Martian exploration

Experiments on Mars in the past 30 years:

1. **Viking missions in the mid-70s**: During these missions the first **chemical analyses of Martian soil** took place. Along with that, four biology experiments to detect biological activity were also conducted.
2. **In 1984,** a study showed that the **isotopic composition of rare gases** (Xenon, Krypton, Neon, and Argon) in the earth, matched the isotopic ratios of the Martian atmosphere measured by Viking spacecraft. This discovery boosted the understanding of the geochemical evolution of Mars.
3. **Mars Odyssey spacecraft in 2001**: This spacecraft found the hydrogen signature on Mars. This indicated the presence of **water ice on Mars.**
4. **Phoenix Mars lander in 2008:** NASA sent another spacecraft to Mars. It landed near the Martian South Pole. The lander **officially confirmed the presence of**
5. **water** on Mars for the first time.

Why are scientists so interested in Mars?

Scientists are interested in Martian research primarily for two reasons. They are,

First, life may have evolved in the past on Mars. Further, Mars had conditions similar to earth. There is a possibility that microscopic life evolved on Mars.

Second, Mars is the only planet that humans can visit. It has a temperature ranging from between 20 degrees C at the Equator to minus 125 degrees C at the poles.

What is the significance of the Perseverance mission?

Perseverance focuses on finding life on Mars and will help in a future human mission to that planet.

1. Perseverance would bring rock samples back from Mars. This will provide a **decisive answer on whether life existed on Mars in the past or not.**
2. **Producing oxygen on Mars** is necessary for a successful human mission. Perseverance has an instrument known as **MOXIE or Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilisation Experiment.** It will use 300 watts of power to produce about 10 grams of oxygen using atmospheric carbon dioxide.
   - This will provide oxygen for breathing and rocket fuel.
3. Perseverance will carry the Radar Imager for Mars' Subsurface Experiment (**RIMFAX).** This will **help in looking for underground water on Mars.** It could possibly help in the human settlement on Mars if the water is found.

4. Apart from that, Perseverance will **try to fly a helicopter on Mars** (which has a sparse atmosphere). The Mars Helicopter is really a small drone. Currently, long-distance transportation on Mars has to depend on vehicles that rely on rocket engines for powered ascent and powered descent.

Conclusion

- Perseverance is expected to provide a significant understanding of whether a **human mission to Mars is possible or not**. Not only that, it is expected to give a decisive answer to the question of whether **Mars ever had or still has microscopic life** on the planet.

34. Factors affecting present inflation level in India

Source: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GHU89SO5J.1&imageview=0

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Synopsis: The recent January 2021 retail inflation data provides relief to monetary authorities. Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 4.06% which is a desired outcome for ensuring macroeconomic stability.

Background:

- The inflation had remained above the RBI's threshold mark of 6% for six months till November. The **ideal range of CPI is 2-6%.**
- In January 2021, inflation reached **a 16-month low.**
- The fall in the inflation rate was particularly attributed to a modest rise of 1.89% in Consumer Food Price Index. This was majorly a result of 15.48% drop in vegetable prices and easing of cereal prices.

RBI's view over inflation:

- As per RBI, bumper Kharif crops, good vegetable supply in winters, and better prospects of rabi produce could reduce inflation in future months.
- Further, rising fears of avian flu will decrease poultry demand and control inflation.
- However, RBI is cautious of higher inflation in pulses and edible oils. A 13.4% price rise was seen in pulses and products. Further, the rise in the oils and fats category was 19.7%.

Future concerns which may cause inflation to rise:

- **First**, inflation for eggs and meat was in double digits despite the avian flu threat.
- **Second**, the favorable base effect is about to decrease. It is causing fear of rising inflation in the future. The base effect is the fluctuation in a monthly inflation figure due to low or high base i.e. level of inflation in the same month a year-ago.
- **Third**, the producers in multiple sectors (automobile, real estate, etc.) are expected to transfer the cost of inputs to consumers. This is due to rising input costs as shown by IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).
- **Fourth**, the rising fuel prices could also contribute to increasing inflation. Diesel has already crossed the 80 rupees mark which has pushed prices of numerous goods.

In the current scenario, banks have been given necessary support which has enhanced their liquidity. This calls for due vigilance by policymakers, else inflation can't be moderated thereby impacting macroeconomic stability.

35. Need to regulate Big techs in India

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3: role of media and social networking sites

Synopsis: The Indian government is planning to announce important regulations on big Internet-related technology companies.

Introduction

At present the world has two visions of the internet technology:

- **Libertarianism**: Under this, liberal internet policies were followed by countries such as the USA. This model was successful in the past but now under pressure due to internal conflicts.
- **Authoritarianism**: Under this, Countries will enforce strict authoritative Internet policies. For example, China. This model is now getting strong support.

Both of these creating a dilemma for other countries in regulating the big techs.

What is the need to regulate the big-techs?

There are several issues with internet platforms. These issues get intensified after big-techs starts creating and generating their own contents. The issues are

1. Big tech companies acquire monopoly power in their operations. This leaves no scope for free and fair competition.
2. The **algorithms used by the big-techs were opaque and not subject to accountability.**
3. These big tech companies became the symbol of inequality. They acquired more economic and political power.
4. These **companies viewed themselves as a sovereign power** and regulated speech on their own. For example, a private CEO banning the elected president trump from social media.
5. There might be a **harmful impact of big tech on democracy and democratisation**. Democracies became more polarised and free speech abuses got increased.

What does India intend to achieve by regulating the big-techs?

The regulations against big tech are an **attempt to curb the unfair advantages taken by the** big techs to exploit the Indian market. India can create competition and be more self-reliant in the internet space.

1. **Ideological push to Atmanirbhar Bharat:** China kept out big tech companies from exploiting their market. At the same time, China did not face any difference in financial flows or investment in other areas. This is because China developed more indigenous technology. India can also create Atmanirbhar Bharat by regulating big techs.
2. Many critics have urged the government to **potentially control the information** as much as possible. By regulating big techs India **can control the data generated by Indians** more easily.

Suggestions:

- **The government should show a moral commitment** and **invest in science and technology**.
- **India can address complicated issues** by following these steps:
  - Enhancing India's technological capabilities.
  - Creating an **institutional structure** to prevent big techs from diminishing democracy and freedom of speech.

36. Clean energy is the key to COVID-19 recovery

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 3 – Investment models.

Synopsis – United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) report shows that energy demand reductions have mainly impacted fossil fuels. But Renewable energy development continued to grow throughout 2020. This shows that clean energy is key to the COVID-19 recovery, not fossil fuels.

Introduction-

UN-ESCAP released the Regional Trends Report, 2021. The report titled '**shaping a sustainable energy future in Asia and the Pacific – A greener, more resilient and inclusive energy system'.** The report examines the ambitions and progress of ESCAP member states in achieving sustainable energy goals.

Importance of continuous energy supply during the pandemic-

1. Hospitals and healthcare facilities require continuous energy supply to function 24X7.
2. Allowing work from home, distance learning and communication of essential health information status all required uninterrupted power.
3. **Support for cold chain systems and logistics** also need an uninterrupted power supply. This is essential for the proper transportation, distribution and storage of the Covid-19 vaccine.

How to make society more resilient to future crises such as COVID-19?

1. Governments should make **meaningful progress on SDGs**. The government can achieve this by addressing the systemic issues that made societies more vulnerable to COVID-19. Such as addressing issues in health, decent work, poverty and socio-economic inequalities,
2. **Fiscal stimulus packages focused on investments that support SDGs.** This can be achieved by not investing in industries such as fossil fuels. At the same time focusing more on renewable energy and energy efficiency projects is required. This will create industries that are resilient to crisis.

What are the advantages of promoting clean energy?

1. **Clean energy will create more jobs**. Evidence suggests that clean energy will create more jobs than fossil fuel projects for similar investments. For example, an increase in spending on clean cooking and electricity access will enhance economic activities in rural areas. Further, it will improve the health and well-being of women and children.
2. **Low-carbon infrastructure and technologies reduce global warming.** This will take a step closer towards achieving ambitious climate pledges, and the Paris Climate deal. It is also important to note that several countries have announced the **carbon neutrality targets.**

Conclusion:

COVID-19 crisis has shown that we can restrict fossil fuels and can be more adaptive and resilient. But we should not waste the opportunities given by the crisis to phase out fossil fuels.

37. Importance of Perseverance Mission on Mars

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Synopsis: The Perseverance mission on Mars will test out technologies to help sustain the presence of humans there. Further, it will help the future manned mission to Mars along with several other important experiments.

Introduction

The scientific community is suspecting that life may have existed on Mars before Earth. Thus, there might be a possibility of microscopic life on the planet. Understanding this will enhance our studies of evolution and nurture of life outside the earth.

Landing of Perseverance rover:

1. **NASA's mission on Mars has focused on finding traces** and trails of water. The water may be related to the possible existence of life on the planet.
2. The curiosity rover which landed on Mars in 2012 found out regions that could have hosted life.
3. The recent NASA mission, Mars 2020, landed on the **Jezero Crater** in Mars on February 18.

What does the new Mars mission aim to do?

The mission is expected to last at least the duration of **one Mars year**, i.e. 687 earth days. The goals for this mission are to look for signs of ancient life and collect rock and soil samples.

1. Perseverance will take the investigation made by the earlier Curiosity rover to the next level by **studying the Jezero Crater**. This particular crater was chosen because it was found to be home to an ancient delta according to an aerial study.
   - **Clay minerals and carbonates were found on the crater.** It makes this crater a good place to search for life's existence.
2. The rover will **study the geology of mars and store samples** in a place that can be accessed by a future mission.
3. The rover will **test out technologies** that will **help to sustain the presence of humans** in future. This includes testing an instrument that **extracts oxygen from atmospheric carbon dioxide**.
4. The rover carries a **helicopter named Ingenuity.** Ingenuity is specially designed to **fly in Mars's thin atmosphere**. Its only purpose would be to **demonstrate flight on Mars**.

The conclusion

- Perseverance Mission will be able to answer whether little green microbes did inhabit Mars in the distant past or not. But till then we have to wait and watch the progress.

38. Challenges in controlling Zoonotic diseases in India

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3: Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: India can turn into a hotspot for zoonotic diseases (diseases that spread from animal to human), if not controlled now. Research must be proactive as this could be a larger crisis than the COVID pandemic.

Introduction

During the covid-19 pandemic, **Scientists developed tools to study the virus more effectively**. Further, they also set up channels to test the efficacy of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved drugs. But the challenges of Zoonotic diseases still exist.

Vulnerability of India to Zoonotic diseases:

Global meta-analyses mention that **Zoonotic diseases are likely to emerge in areas with many mammal species**. As per the analysis, high land use and land cover change, and high human population density are the reasons for zoonotic diseases.

1. According to Global meta-analyses, **India can be a hotspot** for the possible **emergence of zoonotic diseases** in the world.
2. **India's approach** to addressing zoonotic diseases has mainly been **reactive**. This is evident as the research and public health intervention usually begin when there is an outbreak.

Challenges in controlling Zoonotic diseases?

There are several scientific challenges that exist in zoonotic diseases**.** They are,

1. One **cannot predict the zoonotic disease pandemic**. This is evident from the recent Covid pandemic.
2. It is **hard to collect viral and bacterial samples** from biodiversity. Collecting samples is nearly impossible from wild reservoirs like bats and rodents.
3. It is **impossible to monitor and control biodiversity hotspots.** Further, the government **cannot detect the transmission** of the pathogen from one hot spot to another.
4. Moreover, it is difficult **to predict the evolutions of pathogens and their relation with the hosts** (animals). It is also evident in the COVID pandemic.

Suggestions:

Scientists have to conduct interdisciplinary research and sustained efforts to reduce challenges. So, Scientists from various domains have to come forward and work for a common cause just like they did for covid testing and vaccinations.

39. Rise of excise duty on petrol and fiscal stance of the government

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, Growth, Development, and Employment.

Synopsis: The rise in excise duty on petrol is in contradiction with the fiscal stance adopted by the government in the Economic Survey 2020-21. The new fiscal stance requires the government to borrow more instead of increasing taxes.

Background:

- The COVID-19 has brutally impacted the economy due to which the fiscal deficit has risen to 9.5%. This is 2.7 times higher than the expected 3.5% fiscal deficit.
- Further, there is a drastic fall in receipts of revised budgetary estimates in comparison to original estimates.
- Thus, the government increased excise duty on Petrol and Diesel. It resulted in an increase in the prices of petrol and diesel for the consumer.
- However, a rise of Rs. 94000 crore rise was observed in estimates of excise duty.
- This is the traditional approach that calls for increasing taxes rather than borrowing to improve the economic situation of the country.

Rationale behind such move:

1. An increase in sales tax/ excise duty can be fruitful in **improving revenue collection.**
2. This occurs as demand for products like petrol, diesel, tobacco, etc. is **inelastic** (not changing significantly with a change in price).

3. Further, a **rising fiscal deficit is not desired.** The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act **(FRBM) restricts its rise to 3.5%.**
4. It is believed that fiscal deficit automatically transforms into government debt. Such high debts coupled with their interests can create a **debt trap**. It is a situation where present borrowings keep increasing to repay past borrowings and service charges.
5. This in turn reduces the scope of spending on judicious activities and also decreases the creditworthiness of the government.

However, rising excise duty didn't prove to be fruitful.

Impact of rising excise duties:

- Revenue from an increase in duty could not compensate for the shortfall in other revenue resources. Thus, the fiscal deficit has increased to 9.5%.
- Further, these duties have been increased on final and intermediate goods which would increase the inflation level in the future.
- The estimation of a **7.7% output decline** simply means loss of employment. This along with rising price levels would **enhance inequalities** in society.

What is the New approach given by Economic Survey?

1. The survey of 2020-21 calls for adopting the approach of Professor Olivier Blanchard who has given a counter view to FRBM act. As per him, debt-financed fiscal spending can increase growth.
2. It may not necessarily reduce the inequalities but can definitely help in the overall growth of the economy.
3. Professor's approach doesn't focus on increasing the tax on the rich to augment expenditure and reduce inequalities.
4. Further government's fiscal expenditure has a stronger multiplier impact during recessions compared to booms. This happens as:
    - When the economy is in a boom, the private sector is willing to borrow more. But it may get crowded out if interest rates are increased due to more government borrowings.
    - When the economy is in recession, the private sector is unwilling to borrow due to uncertain long-term expectations. Higher government borrowings in this situation are desired for boosting the confidence of the private sector.
5. The adoption strategy **requires the GDP growth rate to be higher than the sovereign rate of interest.** It would prevent the creation of a future debt trap.
6. The survey pointed out that India's average interest rate and growth rate over the last 25 years (leaving out FY 2020-21) have been 8.8% and 12.8% respectively. This satisfies Blanchard's condition.

As the condition got satisfied, it is difficult to ascertain why the government deviated from the recommendations of the economic survey. The only reasonable argument could be higher interest rates than the growth rate in 2020-21.

40. How to become Petroleum Independent?

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS- 3

Synopsis: India first needs to manage the demand for petroleum products, before expanding and diversifying the energy supply.

How government can reduce dependence on petroleum?

There are many things that the government can and should do to reduce dependence on petroleum.

1. **First, the government should introduce a zero-emissions vehicle (ZEV)** program. It requires all vehicle manufacturers to produce a definite number of electric vehicles. ZEV programs are present in China, South Korea, and Canada, etc.
2. **Second, the government should strengthen fuel efficiency** requirements for new passenger cars and commercial vehicles. Two-wheelers are not subject to any fuel efficiency standards even when they consume two-third of the petrol used in India.
   - A target of 50% reduction in fuel consumption by 2-wheelers may result in innovations, such as increasing efficiency of internal combustion engine (ICE) efficiency and increase in electric driven two-wheelers.
3. **Third, similar steps should be applied to the passenger vehicle** and heavy-duty commercial vehicle. Consumers who switch to electric vehicles will save even more money as electricity is cheaper compared to petrol and diesel.

What are the steps taken by the government?

1. The **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) was launched.** However, **the NEMMP mainly focused on hybrid electric vehicles** and most incentives went towards subsidizing mild hybrids instead of electric vehicles.
2. Heavy-duty vehicles, which consume nearly 60% diesel, are now subject to fuel efficiency standards.
3. **The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) scheme** now focuses largely on electric vehicles.
   - **The FAME scheme** focuses on two- and three-wheelers, taxis, and buses. It should be extended to all passenger cars, commercial vehicles, and to agricultural tractors.
4. **Introducing complementary policies** like stepping up investments in charging infrastructure is essential. The GST rates for all passenger vehicles could be made proportional to their fuel efficiency level.

Conclusion

- Adopting strict fuel efficiency standards and a ZEV program by 2024 can result in India's petroleum demand peaking by 2030. By that, the government can save money for the consumer while enhancing long-term energy security by wielding the regulatory tools at its disposal.
- Thus, it is time for India to adopt stringent fuel efficiency standards and a zero-emissions vehicle program.

41. PM Modi's acknowledgement of role of private sector

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3 -Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

Synopsis: Future growth in India should be led by the private sector. The government should encourage the private sector as a central part of its strategy.

Introduction

Recently the Prime Minister acknowledged the role of the private sector. Now it is up to the private sector to grow their business, pursue excellence, follow the law of the land and pay taxes.

Why the role of the private sector is critical in India?

- **India has limited capital and the private sector is the best provider of capital** in the economy. The private sector will deliver the most benefit in terms of growth or return on capital employed.
- **Private sector focus on wealth creation.** The PM also praised the wealth creators with a logic that if you can't create wealth, you won't be able to distribute it. The creation of wealth is essential for growth, employment and the reduction of poverty.

- India's **successes in many fields linked to the private sectors**. Sectors such as banks, airlines, insurance, telecom, IT services, IT-enabled services etc were created a huge growth after they have been open up to private players.

What can be expected from PM speech?

The Prime Minister's speech has raised the expectations that more positive reform for the private sector is around the corner.

- **First,** the government can now bring in **policy and future economic reforms** in India as it has recognised the private sector's role in parliament.
- **Second,** India has been **making worthy steps in the Ease of Doing Business.** It is easier now to start a business in India than it was a decade ago. A government willing to listen gives a good head start to solving those problems.
- **Third, the success of the Mudra Yojana and Start-up India** has proven the new wave of innovation and enterprise in young India. India is now willing to look at other sectors such as space, defence, aeronautics etc.
- **Fourth,** Private involvement in the **India stack** (Stack is a combination of technological projects that comprises all the technologies required to operate for any particular sector) has revolutionised the fintech sector. Now the digital health stack will likely to do the same for the health tech sector.

Suggestions:

- The private sector should now follow the law of the land and pay taxes. They should also become good corporate citizens of India or else the mistrust of the private sector might affect the sector.
- The upcoming entrepreneurs will be the strong foundations of Atmanirbhar Bharat. The recent Union Budget has made it clear that the government will pursue economic reform and go for growth.

42. New Social Media Code – A much needed one for India

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3: role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges

Synopsis: The new Social media code is much-needed to ensure the online platforms are subject to law of the land

Introduction:

Recently, the government introduced the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The rules have the potential to transform the online media platforms to fit into the Indian ecosystem.

Few salient provisions in the New Social Media Code:

1. The OTT platforms together have to **enact a code for self-regulation.** Further, the OTT platforms also **have to classify the content**. So that, an underage minor will not be able to view the adult contents.
2. The new social media code creates a **three-tier grievance redressal mechanism**.
   - **First-tier**: The **publishers** of social media have to **appoint officers** to redress their grievances. These officers have to ensure the time-bound disposal of grievances.
   - A **self-regulating body** headed by a retired judge will be at the **Second-tier**.
   - The Central government **oversight committee** will be in the **third tier**.
3. All the **grievances have to be resolved within the framework of India's laws**. Recently, Twitter disobeyed government rules. After the implementation of New social media codes, social media have to obey the government's directions.

Why do India need New Social Media Code?

1. The policy will **create a level playing field** in two important things.
   - Between the online news platforms and print media
   - Between the online news platforms and television news media.
2. The new social media rules will **bring in the online news portals within the ambit of the code of ethics**. It is a much-needed step considering the recklessness and irresponsibility shown by some of the digital media platforms.
3. Further, the new social media rules **aim to achieve oversight responsibilities.** Like the film certification agency for Cinema, the social media platforms have to **ensure a content classification.**
4. The new social media codes will **ensure freedom of speech to the artists.** This is achieved through **self-regulation**. Social media platforms can provide more freedom for artists to create content. Since they are the ones going to regulate it, they can classify the content of artists instead of banning them like other media (film, print, etc).

What are the global lessons for digital media platforms in self-regulation?

1. **Lessons from Australia:** In Australia, Digital companies have drafted a code to deal with fake news and disinformation. This is called the **Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation.** The code has few important provisions including the removal of content and disabling the content from the digital platforms.
2. **Lessons from the UK:** The UK government has proposed an **"Online Safety Bill".** The Bill aims to deal heavily on digital platforms that promote violence, child abuse, terrorist material, cyber bullying, etc.

Conclusion:

The New social media code has the necessary provisions to ensure free speech. At the same time, it will regulate and stop social media companies from violating the law of the land.

43. Draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology- developments

Synopsis: The draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 202o has the potential to transform the science and research in India.

Introduction:

The government introduced a draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020 in January 2021. The draft policy aims to address the issues in the past four science and technology policies.

Evolution of Science, Technology and Innovation Policies in India:

Right after independence, India realised the value of science in promoting the welfare of people. So far, India has released four policies in Science. These are:

1. **The Scientific Policy Resolution, 1958**
   - The policy aimed to lay the foundation of scientific temper and develop scientific enterprises around India.
   - The policy led to the establishment of many research institutes and national laboratories across India.
   - **Achievement of the policy**: By the end of 1980, India developed advanced scientific infrastructure along with sufficient scientific personnel.
2. **The Science and Technology Policy Statement, 1983**
   - This policy aimed to achieve **technological self-reliance.** The policy also aimed to use technology to benefit all sections of society.

- The policy aimed to strengthen the research in fields such as biotechnology and electronics.

3. **The Science and Technology Policy, 2003**
   - This is the first Science Policy in India after the economic reforms in 1991.
   - This policy aimed to increase investment in research and development. The policy brought India's investment in research to 0.7% of GDP.
   - During this policy only, the **Scientific and Engineering Research Board** (SERB) was **established in India** to promote research.
4. **The Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, 2013**
   - This policy **brought innovation** into the science and technology policy.
   - The policy aimed to make India as one of the top five global scientific leaders in the world.
   - India achieved this by the following steps
     - The Centre built partnerships with State governments,
     - The government established more research and development centres throughout India
     - India collaborated in international research projects such as **the Neutrino research**, **Large Hadron Collider,** etc.

What are the outcomes of these four scientific policies?

The US-based National Science Foundation released a report. The report highlighted the outcomes of the policies. They are

1. **Achievement of Policies:**
   - India was the third-largest publisher of peer-reviewed science and engineering journal articles and conference papers.
   - India achieved this milestone at the pace of a 10.73% annual growth rate from 2008. This is higher than the growth rate of China (7.81%).
2. **Where do the policies lack?**
   - India's index score was very low in Highly Cited Articles of the world. India has a score of 0.7. This is lower than the US, China and the EU.
   - India's **Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) is only 0.6% of GDP**. This is very low as compared to the U.S. and China (their GERD is greater than 2%).
   - According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) report, **India only filed 2053 patents in 2019**. On the other hand, China filed 58,990 patents and the US filed 57,840 patents.

How India aimed to tackle the drawbacks?

The government aimed to tackle the drawbacks holistically by releasing a new science and technology policy. The government released the **draft of the fifth Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020 (STIP 2020)** in January 2021

Salient provisions of Draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020:

1. The draft STIP **aims to double the following things every 5 years.**
   1. Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) researchers
   2. Private sector contribution to the GERD
   3. Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD)
2. Apart from that the draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy also aim to **get India into the top three scientific superpowers of the world within a decade**.
3. The draft STIP 2020 also **defined the Open Science Framework.** The framework will **provide pan India access to all scientific journals**. This will be achieved by creating a **"one nation, one subscription".**

4. The draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy will **improve Private sector participation**. This will be achieved by a strategy. Under it, the State governments will fund the research. The Private will participate in it. The government will provide fiscal incentives. Further, the government will also support innovation in the MSME sector.
5. The other focus areas of the draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy are:
    1. The provision for **supporting indigenous knowledge** systems in India
    2. The draft STIP provide steps to **improve artificial intelligence**
    3. The policy will encourage the **participation of Indian scientific diaspora**
    4. The policy will set up a **special fund for research** known as the **strategic technology development fund.**

Conclusion:

The draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy looks good on paper and also has the potential to transform the entire science, technology and innovation in India. But the actual results will occur only if the **government fulfil its role as the primary funder of research and encourage the private sector**.

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