



Mains Marathon
Compilation

5th to 10th December, 2022

Mains Marathon Compilation for the Month of December, (First Week) 2022

- 1. Institutional independence is a larger and more complex issue than appointments alone. Discuss in light of the recent controversy over the appointment of Election Commissioners.**
- 2. Soil degradation can have irreparable consequences on human and ecosystem health. Comment.**
- 3. How far, do you think, the DESH bill is going to improve the investment environment in India or enhance export competitiveness?**
- 4. What are the reasons behind the very slow progress of the energy transition in comparison to the technology transition?**
- 5. What are the issues and challenge in a comprehensive border management system? Suggest some measures for effective border management in India.**
- 6. Explain how ocean currents help in establishing global heat balance. Also, explain the relationship between ocean currents and the habitability of the coastal areas.**
- 7. Highlight the economic and strategic significance of India's relations with Central Asia.**
- 8. What is the rationale behind the recently introduced Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill?**

Q.1) Institutional independence is a larger and more complex issue than appointments alone. Discuss in light of the recent controversy over the appointment of Election Commissioners.

Indian Express

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain issues with Institutional independence with respect to the recent controversy over the appointment of Election Commissioners.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

Article 324 envisaged that the Commission be led by a single CEC (Chief Election Commissioner). The President can appoint more Election Commissioners (ECs). But this is subject to any law made in that behalf by Parliament. Recently, the Supreme Court mooted the idea of including the Chief Justice of India in the appointment committee of CEC to ensure “**neutrality**”.

Institutional independence is more complex than appointments

The present system of the government appointing CEC and ECs does **not ensure the independence** of the election commission.

- The successive governments have “completely destroyed” the independence of ECI by ensuring no CEC gets the full six-year term since 1996.
- These institutions do **not have an independent source of political power** and rely instead on the backing from political intermediaries for their mandate.
- Other institutions such as the judiciary and election commission may be required to adjudicate between competing claims in line with the existing normative consensus.
- Institutions like the RBI may be **empowered for fixed functions** like the monetary policy and so on.
- The institution and its **role is an outcome of political consensus** wherein political intermediaries have agreed to delineate some function of governance and give it to this institution.
- The institution draws legitimacy from the specific mandate but **operates in the dynamic space in the changing balance of power** between competing political factions.
- Even when institutional design insulates the appointment process from the executive — such as in the judiciary — **political power can manifest in multiple ways**. At the individual level, dissent can be neutralised through inducement, marginalisation, intimidation, blackmail, harassment, propaganda, transfers, etc, through allied (state) institutions.
- **Bypassing Standing Committees** for legislative scrutiny is another example of undermining an institution itself.

Re-establishing consensus and institutional independence is a political battle which requires mobilising public opinion and organisation. To defend the functional independence of Election commissioners, the guardian of elections itself urgently needs structural safeguards.

Q.2) Soil degradation can have irreparable consequences on human and ecosystem health. Comment.

The Hindu

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain how soil degradation can have irreparable consequences on human and ecosystem health.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

While soil degradation is occurring in 145 million hectares in India, it is estimated that 96.40 million hectares (about **30 percent of the total geographical area**) is affected by land degradation. According to the **Food and Agriculture Organisation's 'State of Land, Soil and Water'** report, globally, the biophysical status of 5,670 million hectares of land is declining, of which 1,660 million hectares (29 percent) is attributed to human-induced land degradation.

Irreparable consequences on human and ecosystem health:

- Healthy soils are essential for our survival. They **support healthy plant growth** to enhance both our nutrition and water percolation **to maintain groundwater levels**.
- Soils help to **regulate the planet's climate** by storing carbon and are the **second largest carbon sink** after the oceans. They help maintain a landscape that is more resilient to the impacts of droughts and floods.
- A key element of **sustainable food production** is healthy soil because nearly 95 per cent of global food production depends on soil. Soil degradation can have disastrous effects around the world such as **an increase in pollution, desertification and a decline in global food production**
- A healthy soil is a living, dynamic ecosystem, packed with microscopic and larger organisms that perform many vital functions including **nutrient cycling; controlling plant disease**, insect and weed pests; improving soil structure with positive effects for soil water and nutrient holding capacity.
- Soil erosion not only affects fertility but also **increases the risk of floods and landslides**.
- It is a global challenge that affects everyone through food insecurity, higher food prices, climate change, **environmental hazards, and the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services**.

As consumers and citizens, we can contribute by **planting trees** to protect topsoil, developing and maintaining **home/kitchen gardens**, and consuming foods that are mainly locally sourced and seasonal.

Q.3) How far, do you think, the DESH bill is going to improve the investment environment in India or enhance export competitiveness?

Business Standard

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain how DESH bill is going to improve the investment environment in India or enhance export competitiveness. Also write some issues associated with it.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

Through the **Development of Enterprise and Service Hubs (DESH)** Bill, the Government proposes to rebrand India's 268 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as 'development hubs'. The Bill aims to make the SEZ Act compliant with World Trade Organization (WTO) norms and boost manufacturing and job creation.

Beneficial:

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- The developers of the zones, (to be called Development Hubs) will **get infrastructure status**, which will allow them to get **easier credit** at competitive rates.
- The Bill removes the restriction that exports should be more than imports over 5 years. Now units can import any amount. They can also do invoicing in rupee to **facilitate domestic transactions**.
- Units in the development hubs will be allowed to **sell goods in the domestic market** with customs duty to be paid only on the imported raw materials and not on the entire finished goods.
- The Bill has introduced a set of **growth criteria** that could include investment and employment ramp-ups as qualifiers for benefits.
- The Bill also proposes **a framework to include the existing industrial parks** in the DESH framework—including those of other government departments like textile parks, food parks, pharma and power.
- With the hegemonic war between the US and China flaring up, it is expected that the foreign investors would move out of China. India's proposed hubs will thus be competing with those in other countries.

Issues:

- The SEZ units in the notified areas will be permitted to sell in the domestic tariff area (DTA). This would create business units each of which would have a **“DESH” area and “Videsh” area with differential tax treatments**.
- India's existing tax laws are complex and contentious. The intra-unit variances were likely to create an **explosion of tax disputes** that will defeat the purpose of the new Bill.
- DESH units producing the same goods as DTA units can enjoy tax breaks. This will create an inherent **disadvantage for DTA units**.
- **Land acquisition by the private sector** has proven a near-intractable problem to date. The DESH Bill does not address this issue.

The proposed DESH legislation is a step in the right direction that will also play a vital role in making India a US\$ 5 trillion economy. The Government must learn the lessons from not-so-successful SEZs and ensure that the proposed hubs make India the center of global manufacturing value chains.

Q.4) What are the reasons behind the very slow progress of the energy transition in comparison to the technology transition?

Business Standard

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain some reasons behind the very slow progress of the energy transition in comparison to the technology transition.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

Energy transition refers to the global energy sector's shift from fossil-based systems of energy production and consumption — including oil, natural gas and coal — to renewable energy sources like wind and solar, as well as lithium-ion batteries.

There are following reasons behind the very slow progress of the energy transition in comparison to the technology transition:

- Energy transitions are not similar to technological transitions. Within 20 years, 50% of the developing world had internet access but despite all the cost reduction and policy support, wind and solar combined accounted for less than 5% of primary energy consumption.
- The world **relies on fossil fuels** for 90% of its primary energy consumption in 1990. Today, it was around 83%. According to the **International Energy Agency**, fossil fuel

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reliance will remain at over 60%, even in 2050, unless the world drastically accelerates behavioural change.

- The media and investors focus on solar and wind investment. But they are **not focussing** on the challenge of **how to electrify large parts of the economy** and mass electrification.
- The world at present is focussing more on the strengthening of the grid but not on energy transmission investments.
- Over the last 20 years, **electricity as a percentage of energy use has risen** only 2-3% in most major economies. No major economy has an electricity share of more than 20% in total energy use. Looking at the combined data for the US/Europe and China, electricity today accounts for only about 2% of the transport energy consumed.
- The US has the lowest gasoline prices of any major economy and does not seem to have the **political will** to put in place the tax structure needed to shift preference to EVs. Even in 2040, EVs will constitute only 40% of the vehicles on the road.

The world needs new investments to change the process and add specialised equipment for the energy transition in energy-intensive manufacturing of products such as cement, steel, plastics, chemicals and fertilisers.

Q.5) What are the issues and challenge in a comprehensive border management system? Suggest some measures for effective border management in India.

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain some issues and challenge in a comprehensive border management system. Also write some measures for effective border management in India.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

India has 14,818 km of land borders and a coastline of 7,516.6 km. All states, except Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Delhi and Haryana, have an international border or a coastline. India has **three types of land border**: international borderline (IBL), line of control (LoC) and line of actual control (LoAC).

Issues in a comprehensive border management system:

- The problems related to border security include **unsettled maritime boundaries**, lack of fully demarcated land borders, and borders based on **artificial boundaries** rather than natural ones.
- Border-guarding forces are often **short on resources and ill-equipped** for modern border management and mastery.
- **Intelligence** gathering and coordination are **imperfect**.
- **Multiple security agencies**: While the **army** is deployed along the LoC and AGPL, the **Border Security Force (BSF)** looks after the international border with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Challenges:

- **Terrains** are diverse and difficult. **Connectivity** with the hinterland and across to other countries is poor.
- Porosity of the border has facilitated various illegal activities such as **smuggling, drugs and arms trafficking, and infiltration**.
- Heroin and **fake Indian currency** are the two predominant items smuggled along India-Pak border.
- The China border sees fairly **regular armed intrusions** e.g. Doklam crisis.

Measures:

- The government should derive implementable ideas from systems of border management of other large countries.

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- **Smart border management** by enabling effective communication and coordination among all security agencies to arrive at a common entity picture, neutralising threats linked to terrorism and organised crime, checking illegal migration etc.
- At the local level, creating **sustainable employment opportunities** in border states by promoting agriculture and horticulture and creating border tourism opportunities.
- **Tighter entry-exit controls** are needed to contain illegal migration and trafficking.
- The **encouragement of private investment** will not only save the government resources but also allow the best practices, innovation and knowledge to be inherited for designing of border infrastructure.
- **Community policing** can increase the vigilance of citizens across different layers in the society.

To achieve stable and secure borders in India, robust technologies for border control and surveillance are required in order to combat real and alleged dangers to the country.

Q.6) Explain how ocean currents help in establishing global heat balance. Also, explain the relationship between ocean currents and the habitability of the coastal areas.

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain how ocean currents help in establishing global heat balance. Also explain the relationship between ocean currents and the habitability of the coastal areas.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

The ocean covers 71 percent of the planet and holds 97 percent of its water, making the ocean a key factor in the storage and transfer of heat energy across the globe. Ocean currents represent a regular volume of water in a definite path and direction. They are like **river flow in oceans**.

How ocean currents help in establishing global heat balance?

- The oceans directly **absorb more than two-thirds of the Sun's heat**, an overall 25% of the planet's global heat budget is transferred through the actions of ocean currents.
- Ocean currents act much like a **conveyor belt**, transporting warm water and precipitation from the equator toward the poles and cold water from the poles back to the tropics.
- **Surface currents** carry warm water toward the poles and deep currents bring most of the cold water back toward the equator.
- Without currents in the ocean, regional temperatures would be more extreme- super hot at the equator and frigid toward the poles. E.g., the **North Atlantic Drift** keeps the coasts of the North Sea (western coast of Europe) warm which is unusual for such high latitude.
- **Warm currents** flow along the **east coast** of continents resulting in **warm and rainy climates** while cold currents flow along the west coast of continents.
- They pile up warm waters in tropics and this warm water is the major force behind **tropical cyclones**.

Relationship between ocean currents and the habitability of the coastal areas:

- The cold ocean current creates a cooler, more **stable environment for coral reefs and marine life** and birds that often live much closer to the poles.
- Warm currents lead to evaporation, which turns into the **rain for the coastal areas**. For instance, North Atlantic Drift brings rainfall to Western parts of Europe throughout the year.
- In Antarctica, strong **upwelling currents pump nitrogen and phosphates** up from the deep sea to **blooms of algae** and other plants. The planktons are eaten by krill. The krill in turn feed penguins, seabirds, etc.

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- Warm ocean currents are responsible for keeping the **ports ice-free**. Norway is a prime beneficiary of the North Atlantic Drift.
- Currents are also important as they help when docking and undocking boats, speeding up shipping lanes, and keeping the ships safe, primarily in narrow waterways.

Ocean currents are emerging as a **possible source of alternative energy** for the coastal countries. As dense water carries an enormous amount of energy that can be captured and converted into usable form through use of water turbines.

Q.7) Highlight the economic and strategic significance of India's relations with Central Asia.

Indian Express

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain some economic and strategic significance of India's relations with Central Asia.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

Recently for the first time, India hosted a meeting of top security officials of Central Asia with a focus on the evolving security situation in Afghanistan. It coincided with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Central Asian countries. Central Asian Republics (**Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan**) form a part of India's extended neighbourhood.

Economic and strategic significance:

- Central Asia is **extremely rich in mineral and natural resources**. Kazakhstan has one of the biggest reserves of uranium, besides stores of coal, lead, zinc, gold, and iron ore. The availability of **commercially viable quantities of natural resources** like oil, gas, uranium, lead, etc. make it important for **India's energy security** (Turkmenistan is part of the proposed **TAPI gas pipeline**).
- The geographical location of central Asia makes it important for India's aspiration to **connect to greater Eurasian region** via land route including the **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
- The **illicit drug trade, religious fundamentalism and terrorism** emanating from the region create greater security challenge for India.
- Central Asia has a **growing consumer market** for goods and services that India can provide.
- Central Asia's **proximity** to middle east, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China makes it important for India **geo-strategic interests**. E.g. security cooperation after the **Taliban takeover in Afghanistan**; to **counter China's influence** in the region;
- The Central Asian countries provide **trade and investment opportunities** in multiple sectors like IT, Pharmaceuticals, Tourism etc.

Given the historical, cultural and economic connect India is well placed to maximize its role in the development of the region. India shall **maximize the use of multilateral platforms like SCO** to further its interests in the region.

Q.8) What is the rationale behind the recently introduced Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill?

The Hindu

Introduction: Contextual introduction.

Body: Explain the rationale behind the recently introduced Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill.

Conclusion: Write a way forward.

Recently **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy** introduced the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, with an objective to **support energy transition**. The Bill amends the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**. It provides for the regulation of energy consumption by equipment, appliances, buildings, and industries.

Rationale behind the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill:

- To address the **transition to clean energy** as the non-fossil fuel capacity was 42% of the total energy generation.
- To facilitate the **achievement of COP-26 goals** to ensure faster decarbonisation of the Indian economy.
- To specify a **carbon credit trading scheme** for expand India's carbon market and promote the use of clean technology.
- To **specify energy consumption standards** for designated consumers (industries, transport sector, commercial buildings etc.) to meet a minimum share of energy consumption from non-fossil sources.
- To **specify norms for energy efficiency and conservation**, use of renewable energy, and other requirements for green buildings.
- To consolidate on the current Act's success. According to BEE, measures for efficient energy use saved approx. 28 million tonnes of oil equivalent energy in 2019-20.
- To **replace natural gas and stop carbon emission**, green hydrogen gas will be used. It will provide energy-efficiency in the construction sector.
- To **enhance the scope of Energy Conservation Building Code** to include sustainability aspects.

The establishment of a domestic carbon market is a progressive step. However, the actual benefit will depend upon the effectiveness of the market. For this, the Government must ensure that proper regulations are established.