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MONTHLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS

JULY 2022

China's Growing Footprint in the Pacific Islands

China's effort to push through a comprehensive framework deal in the China-Pacific Island Countries (PICs) Foreign Ministers meeting failed to gain consensus among the PICs.

WHAT ARE PICs?

- The Pacific Island Countries are a cluster of 14 states which are located largely in the tropical zone of the Pacific Ocean between Asia, Australia and the Americas.

- They include Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

- The islands are divided into three distinct parts – Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

- The main Pacific Islands span the Equator obliquely from northwest to southeast and can be divided into two major physiographic regions by island type – continental and oceanic.

WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PICs?

- Huge potential of EEZs- Though they are some of the smallest and least populated states, they have some of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the world.

- Large EEZs translate into huge economic potential due to the possibility of utilising the wealth of fisheries, energy, minerals and other marine resources present in such zones.

- Role in power rivalry- These countries act as springboards for power projection and laboratories for demonstrating strategic capabilities.

- The Pacific islands also acted as one of the major theatres of conflict during the Second World War between imperial Japan and the U.S.

- Vote bank- The countries act as a potential vote bank for major powers to mobilise international opinion.

What does China seek to achieve from the PICs?

- Marine richness- The PICs lie in the natural line of expansion of China's maritime interest and naval power.

- They are located beyond China's 'First Island Chain' at Far Seas, the control of which will make China an effective Blue Water capable Navy.

- Indo-Pacific issue- At a time when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has emerged as a major force in the Indo-Pacific, the need to influence the PICs becomes more pressing for China.

- Taiwan factor- China which is preparing for what seems like an inevitable military invasion needs to break Western domination of island chains of the Pacific.

- A zero-sum game has been underway in the past few decades in the Pacific between China and Taiwan in terms of gaining diplomatic recognition.

What are the implications of China's latest move?

- Recent moves- In April 2022, China signed a controversial security deal with the Solomon Islands, which raised regional concerns.

- It has also prepared two draft documents – China-PICs Common Development Vision and China-Pacific Islands Five-Year Action Plan on Common Development (2022-2026).

- The PICs did not agree to China's extensive and ambitious proposals, and therefore China failed to get a consensus on the deal.

- Implications- The intensification of China's diplomacy towards the Pacific Islands have made the traditional powers like the U.S. and Australia more cautious.

- The U.S. has started revisiting its diplomatic priority for the region ever since the China-Solomon Islands deal.

Anshum Verma

Compensation for those Implicated in False Cases

Compensation for those Implicated in False Cases – Today Current Affairs

- Besides highlighting the torment suffered by him and his family, Aryan Khan's case threw focus on the countless victims of malicious prosecution.

Today Current Affairs

What is the background of the issue?

- The raid on the vessel resulted in seizure of narcotic substances and the arrest of several people.

- Even though nothing was seized, the agency made sensational claims in court about them being part of an international drug trafficking network

- It also cited messages purportedly exchanged on WhatsApp as evidence.

- A special investigation team from Delhi has now cited lapses in the initial investigation and the lack of prosecutable evidence

- It absolved Mr. Khan and five others and excluded them from the charge sheet filed recently.

- The lapses include

  - failure to video-graph the search of the ship

  - not conducting a medical examination to prove consumption

  - examining Mr. Khan's phone and reading messages on it without any legal basis

Why should a person be compensated if there is false implication? The Hindu Analysis

- If there has been physical discomfort of being in jail because the person may have been in jail for many years.

- There is the mental trauma that not only a person, but also their family and children undergo. The Hindu Analysis

- There is social stigma associated with arrests.

- There is a financial, social and emotional burden of being involved in a crime, (Bogus institute don't follow) which in case you were falsely accused of or maliciously prosecuted.

What about the instances of providing compensation for malicious prosecution? The Hindu Analysis

- Sometimes there can be genuine mistakes and several instances of sedition.

- But a malicious and deliberate act on the part of an investigating officer should be viewed very seriously. The Hindu Analysis

- In scientist Nambi Narayanan's case, he was acquitted 24 years after Kerala police arrested him in a fabricated spy case

- The Supreme Court gave him Rs. 50 lakh as compensation in 2018.

- The Delhi High Court on a couple of occasions has said the person needs to be compensated for having been kept in jail even though he's entitled to bail and all the papers are in order. The Hindu Analysis

- The agencies sometimes err on the side of arresting while the role of the prosecutor and judicial application of mind will help against an error of judgement in prosecuting a person.

Section 66A (punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc.) of the Information Technology Act has been struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015 as unconstitutional.

Do India need a new law to ensure disbursement of compensation? The Hindu Analysis

- Section 211 of the Indian Penal Code talks of a false charge of offence made with an intent to injure.

- It can lead to two years of imprisonment, or up to seven years.

- This section is valid for malicious prosecutions, but further legislation for compensation would be a welcome step. The Hindu Analysis

- There need to be a legislation on this respect as the amount of compensation stays at the discretion of the judiciary.4

- The state should have some legal or statutory responsibility and must also take responsibility in case of wrongful confinement.

Anshum Verma

Infrastructure regarding Food Safety in States

INFRASTRUCTURE REGARDING FOOD SAFETY IN STATES – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

The FSSAI has released the Fourth State Food Safety Index recently.

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

WHAT IS THE STATE FOOD SAFETY INDEX?

FSSAI has developed the State Food Safety Index to measure the performance of states on various parameters of Food Safety.

It was first started in 2018-19 with the aim of creating a competitive and positive change in India's food safety ecosystem.

This index is based on performance of State/ UT on five significant parameters

- Human Resources and Institutional Data

- Compliance

- Food Testing – Infrastructure and Surveillance

- Training & Capacity Building

- Consumer Empowerment

WHAT ABOUT THE RECENT INDEX? THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- In the 4th index, Tamil Nadu topped the list among larger states, followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra.

- Among smaller states, Goa was the winner, followed by Manipur and Sikkim.

- Jammu and Kashmir emerged top among Union Territories, followed by Delhi and Chandigarh.

HOW CAN THE STATES' INDEX BE IMPROVED? THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Support of the Centre– States need the support of the Central government in developing food laboratory infrastructure and enhancing manpower.

- Assistance– Liberal assistance should be provided to the States and Union Territories as far as laboratory infrastructure and improvement of manpower are concerned.

- Role of private sector– The private sector should come forward in a big way to have staff trained at their cost to improve productivity.

- Use of ICT– The participation of information technology majors with the help of non-governmental organisations can be utilised in getting surplus food distributed to the needy.

What are some of the important initiatives for food safety in India? The Hindu Analysis

- Eat Right India Movement– to transform the country's food system in order to ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food for all Indians.

- Eat Right Station Certification– awarded by FSSAI to railway stations that set benchmarks (as per the FSS Act, 2006) in providing safe and wholesome food to passengers.

- The Eat Right Research Awards and Grants– for high quality research in the area of food safety and nutrition in India.

- PAN-India survey– for identifying the presence of industrially produced trans fatty acid content in the selected foods has been released.

Anshum Verma

Climate Index by NITI Aayog

Climate Index by NITI Aayog – Today Current Affairs

What's the problem?

- The weights assigned to the index's six parameters need to be changed because they have tipped the rankings of the States.

Today Current Affairs

About SECI:

Objective: Niti Aayog publishes the State Energy and Climate Index (SECI) to promote healthy competition among states on several energy and climate sector fronts.

27 key performance indicators are used to evaluate the state's performance, and they are grouped under 6 general criteria.

- Discom functionality

- Availability, cost, and dependability

- clean energy programmes

- usage of less energy

- environmental protection

- new endeavours

Ranking: Based on the composite SECI Round I score, the States and UTs are divided into three groups: Front Runners, Achievers, and Aspirants. SECI (Round I) ranks the States' performance on these categories.

The average of the State-wise scores for each parameter's corresponding country-level scores is determined.India received a total score of 40.6.

Larger states Gujarat, Kerala, and Punjab perform the best, while Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh perform the worst. The Hindu Analysis

Goa, Tripura, and Manipur, three smaller states, perform best, while Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, three larger states, perform worst.

The top performing Union Territories are Chandigarh, Delhi, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu, whereas the bottom three are Andaman and Nicobar, Jammu and Kashmir, and Lakshadweep.

What gaps exist in the index? The Hindu Analysis

- SECI's current design and key principles are at odds with one another. When compared to the other efforts made by States and UTs, Discoms performance is given a disproportionately high weight (40 percent) among the many parameters.

- Gujarat thus tops the list of big States in SECI Round I for overall score, yet it does not even rank in the top six for four of the six characteristics.

- It is essential that the index's design is driven by an objective logic rather than by subjective or unrelated factors. The Hindu Analysis

- Rethinking and revising the weights—In order to overhaul the current energy value chain, it is urgently necessary to reevaluate and update the weights given to other factors.

- The introduction of smart meters is the answer to cutting AT&C losses and improving the targeting of DBT programmes to cut Discoms' deadweight losses.

- Current best practices for energy management- States have moved quickly toward these cutting-edge Clean Power Purchase Agreements, showing no inertia (PPAs).

- Indicators like the State's development of a battery ecosystem and progress in implementing clean PPAs can encourage States to adopt them and provide policy clarity. The Hindu Analysis

- Non-progressive nature: SECI is not fair to the States' genuine efforts to reach the net-zero emissions objective and therefore not progressive.

- About 38% of India's total annual primary energy demand is used by the building sector, however states that are leading the way in implementing the Energy Conservation and Building Code 2017 do not even appear in the top 10 of the SECI list. The Hindu Analysis

- Without taking "Just Transition" into account, SECI rankings show that States with a large coal industry perform the worst, but worldwide experience demonstrates that Just Transition policies require extensive preparation, execution, and involvement.

Vivek Raj

Right to choose – An Indian perspective

Right to choose – An Indian perspective – Today Current Affairs

Recently, U.S Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, a 1973 landmark decision giving women in America the right to have an abortion before the foetus is viable outside the womb — before the 24–28-week mark. Abortion rights, which have been available to women for over two generations — will now be determined by individual States.

Today Current Affairs

About the Roe v/s Wade judgement:

In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States made the right to abortion a constitutional right, establishing a benchmark for abortion laws across the world.

Abortion Rights in India : The Hindu Analysis

MTP Act 1971 allows a woman to get an abortion within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, in case of grave danger to woman's physical and mental health.

- If the foetus is between 12 and 20 weeks old, then the procedure requires permission from 2 medical practitioners.

- The Act also allows abortion at any time, if the foetus will be born with severe abnormalities.

MTP (A) Bill 2020 : The Hindu Analysis

- It proposes to accepts failure of contraception, rape, incest or minor women as valid reasons for abortion not just in married but also in unmarried women.

- Raises the legally permissible limit for an abortion to 24 weeks from the current 20 weeks.

- Opinion of 1 registered medical practitioner for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation and 2 for up to 24 weeks.

Why it was necessary? The Hindu Analysis

- India Journal of Medical Ethics points that "10 to 13% of maternal deaths in India are due to unsafe abortions". Also, there is high incidence of unintended pregnancy.

Problems with the MTP A Bill : The Hindu Analysis

- The MTP Act also does not address any ethical issues like medical termination of pregnancy results in the death of a living being.

- Only the contraceptive-failure condition is for "any woman"; rest of provisions are for "only married woman".

Section 377 : The Hindu Analysis

- In 2013, SC of India in S.K Koushal vs Naz Foundation case upheld the section 377 of IPC, which prohibits any unnatural sex.

Navtej Singh Johar V. UoI 2018 : The Hindu Analysis

- The Yogyakarta Principles are a set of binding international legal standards in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Doctrine of progressive realization of rights : The Hindu Analysis

- Edmund Burke had emphasized that a Constitution embodies the spirit of a nation, which is ever-growing. That is, the scope of constitution expands by the past experiences and influences, which in turn makes the future better.

- Also, Thomas Jefferson has said "the constitution must go hand in hand with the progress of human mind."

SC's comments : The Hindu Analysis

- Section 377 is arbitrary. LGBT community possess rights like others. Majoritarian views and popular morality cannot dictate constitutional rights.

- Autonomy of an individual is important. He or she cannot surrender it to anyone.

- 'Homosexuality is not a mental disorder."

Thus, it can be seen that the right to choose, as an integral part of very basic human freedom is being expanded day by day in India. Seeing a judgement of that dilute that standard in USA – a source of inspiration for a lot of intellectual around the world is indeed heart-breaking.

Vikas Gupta

No to Pharmaceutical Freebies

No to Pharmaceutical Freebies – Today Current Affairs

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court has ruled against doctors receiving gifts from pharmaceutical corporations.

Today Current Affairs

What is the basis of the judgement?

In the matter of M/s Apex Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. v. Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax, Large Taxpayer Unit-II, the business was providing doctors with free samples of Zincovit, a health supplement it was producing.

The Supreme Court denied Apex Laboratories' request for a special leave to deduct the cost of gifts given to physicians. The Hindu Analysis

The Madras High Court's ruling was upheld by the Bench, which stated that it is "obviously illegal by law" for pharmaceutical companies to give freebies to doctors.

The Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002, were referenced by the court and relied upon.

According to Section 37(1) of the Income Tax Act of 1961, doctors cannot deduct the gifts they receive. The Hindu Analysis

The court determined that it is immoral to have prescriptions influenced by the promise of freebies in cases when patients have put their trust in doctors.

The Court was aware that the price of such freebies is added to the price of medications sold,

raising their costs and creating a vicious cycle that harms the public.

How does the United States fare? The Hindu Analysis

The Court took note of a report entitled "Savings Available with Full Generic Substitution of Multiple Source Brand Drugs in Medicare Part D" that was published by the US Department of Health and Human Services Office.

It was said that if generic identical medications had been prescribed, the beneficiaries may have saved more than 600 million dollars in out-of-pocket expenses.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services must receive reports from manufacturers of drugs, devices, biologics, and medical supplies on three major categories of payments or transfers of value, including meals, travel reimbursements, and consulting fees. This reporting requirement is mandated by the Physician Payments Sunshine Act 2010 (Section 6002 of the Affordable Care Act, 2010). The Hindu Analysis

These include out-of-pocket costs for speakers, travel, gifts, honoraria, entertainment, charitable contributions, educational grants, research grants, etc. that are paid for by manufacturers.

What is still unresolved? The Hindu Analysis

The retail price conundrum The sale of medications at Maximum Retail Price, or MRP, is the area of law left unrecognised in this decision.

Despite the existence of the Drug Price Limit Order and the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, very little is done to control the price at which medicines are sold.

Their so-called research and development costs are not being properly investigated, nor are their profit margins being kept within the permitted range.

What is still unresolved? The Hindu Analysis

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What should we do next? The Hindu Analysis

The law must be changed to require drug manufacturers to offer their products at a verified actual cost that also includes an acceptable profit margin for each item.

The pricing must be the same everywhere around the nation.

Classified life-saving medications should only be sold at cost or even at a discount. The Hindu Analysis

This ruling ought to be discussed and extended to other immoral actions and the spending of tax dollars.

Financial tools, such as income-tax provisions, can be used to prevent such expenditures from occurring and tax the same or taxable income in the hands of recipients, as in the case of assurances and declarations made during election campaigns by political parties by providing free laptops, waived electricity fees, food grains, forgiveness of loans, etc.

Vivek Raj

Juvenile Justice Amendment Act – A socio-economic analysis

- Ministry of Women and Child Development had introduced the act in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya Rape case.

PROVISIONS OF THE ORIGINAL ACT:

- It classifies offences as petty, serious and heinous with different processes for each category.
- Age reduced from 18 years to 16 years for, to be treated as adult, in case of heinous crimes. And also gives statutory status to the Child Adoption Resources Authority (CARA).
- It also proposes several rehabilitation and social integration measures for institutional and non-institutional children. It provides for sponsorship and foster care as completely new measures. It also covers children requiring care, protection, and adoptions (a single male cannot adopt a girl child).
- Mandatory registration of all institutions engaged in providing child care.
- New offences including illegal adoption, corporal punishment in child care institutions, the use of children by militant groups, and offences against disabled children are also incorporated.
- The Juvenile Justice Board will assess whether the perpetrator of a heinous crime aged between 16 and 18, had acted as a 'child' or as an 'adult.' The board will be assisted in this process by psychologists and social experts.

Rationale of the bill:

- Under the existing act, the government is facing implementation hurdles and procedural delays. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data also underscores a surge in juvenile crime, especially in the 16-18 age bracket.
- The Supreme Court had also asked the government to re-visit the Juveniles law so that a juvenile accused of rape and murder cannot get away by claiming he was too young to understand the consequences of his crime.

Supreme Court in Shahaab Ali vs State of U.P:

- The Supreme Court has made it clear that the police has no right to detain children in conflict with law in a lockup or a jail. S/he has to be placed immediately under the care of the special juvenile police unit or a designated child welfare officer.
- The child has to be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB).
- Once a child is produced before a JJB, bail is the rule (43A). And even if, for some reason, bail is not granted, a child cannot be put behind bars. He has to be lodged either in an observation home or in a place of safety.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2021

- It means that DMs and ADMs will monitor the functioning of various agencies under the JJ Act in every district – including the Child Welfare Committees, the Juvenile Justice Boards, the District Child Protection Units and the Special Juvenile Protection Units.
- The DM will also carry out background checks of CWC members, who are usually social welfare activists. This can prevent child abuses.
- Instead of the court, the District Magistrate (including Additional District Magistrate) will now issue adoption orders.

Analysis:

- Rehabilitation Management Committee set up under JJ Act said that the juvenile's mental health report was not available in most cases, which is a crucial part of the rehabilitation plan. Thus, not letting people to understand the condition of the juvenile viz., whether he has remorse on the act or not.
- An emotionally disturbed young person would need a comprehensive and long-term mental health plan including services like psychiatric assessment and therapy, counselling, day-to-day supervision, monitoring, life skills education, etc.
- The main failure is in the juvenile justice cares homes and their working which allows the radicalization and exploitation of the juvenile rather than rehabilitation.
- A committee setup by US centre for disease control, reviewed the US juvenile transfer system and found that those transferred to adult jails became more hardened criminals

then those who served juvenile rehabilitation centre.

Thus in conclusion it can be said that the act has various provisions to deal with the necessity of the life. However the recent amendment has been debated to strengthening the bureaucracy at the cost of civil society.

Pradeep Kumar

Issues with LQBTQIA++ health

Issues with LQBTQIA++ health

What's the problem?

There must be comprehensive and long-term remedies for the mental diseases and difficulties that LGBTQIA++ persons in India experience.

LGBTQIA++: Who are they?

- The letters "L," "G," and "B" stand for sexual orientation, or the people to whom one is attracted, most frequently lesbian or homosexual people.
- Both men and women find bisexuals attractive.
- Anyone who identifies as a sex other than that with which they were born is considered transgender.
- The letter Q stands for queer and questioning.
- Queer is frequently used to identify oneself as a part of the LGBTQIA++ community, whereas Questioning is a name one may use to communicate they are investigating their identity and may not want to call themselves.
- The "I" refers to intersex, a condition in which a person has reproductive or sexual anatomy at birth that doesn't appear to conform to the stereotypical categories of female or male.
- Asexual people, or those who lack sexual desire, are referred to as "A."
- ++ denotes inclusiveness and openness.

Why do LGBTQIA++ populations continue to be at risk for chronic mental illnesses and difficulties?

- The Raahat Project, which has been focusing on using participatory approaches, has brought to light a number of difficulties that LGBTQIA++ populations regularly deal

with in prestigious colleges.

- mental disease causes
- permanent discord
- ingrained stigma
- Discrimination Abuse
- pressure to embrace sexual orientation and gender norms
- Stigmatizing Internalized Homophobia's effects
- loneliness and worry
- Use of drugs
- severe discomfort and low self-esteem
- pain and self-loathing
- Male transphobia

WHAT HEALTH ISSUES ARE THERE?

- Services for affirmative mental health are rare.
- In India, the vast majority of psychiatrists still treat various sexual orientations and gender identities as disorders and employ "correctional therapy."
- The same holds true for general medical care.
- Because of the abuse and stigma, public health care is not as popular.

HOW CAN LGBTQIA++ COMMUNITIES MAINTAIN THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING?

- Multistakeholder approach: There is a need for comprehensive, long-term solutions that involve all parties involved, including families, communities, educational institutions, health care providers, and mental health experts. Families are also frequently a major cause of mental health stress.
- Building self-care skills is a crucial component for queer adolescents and young people.
- Movement for LGBTQ Mental Health: In order to alter societal perceptions, there has to be a movement for LGBTQ Mental Health that is non-discriminatory and public-aware.
- Community building – Improving the mental health of LGBTQIA++ individuals requires a strong sense of community.
- Create supportive, safe, and educational environments, as well as locations where people can get access to health care and information on mental health.

Vivek Raj

Banking Reforms – An analytical perspective

A good banking system means a good working economy. However, it has been suggested that control of the government has been a ban in the banking system. Historically, government has been sanctioning loans as per the linkage on personal repo.

1. J. Nayak Committee on governance in PSU banks:
- Bank Investment Company or BIC:
  - It will hold the govt. shares in PSBs.
  - Monitor the performance of PSBs and make suggestions.
  - Acts as a buffer between PSBs and the government.
  - Help the PSBs to raise additional capital.

Indradhanush Scheme 2015:

- Appointments: The Government has decided to separate the post of Chairman/CEO and Managing Director. Private sector candidates can also apply for the position of MD & CEO.
- Bank Board Bureau (BBB): It is a 7-member body, which will replace the Appointments Board for recommendation of appointment of whole-time Directors as well as non-Executive Chairman of PSBs. It would also act as the watchdog for PSBs' performance. This is also the first step towards a banking investment company. The Ministry of Finance takes the final decision on the appointments in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office.
- Capitalization: The government has announced to infuse Rs 70,000 crore in state-run banks over four years while they will have to raise a further Rs 1.1 lakh crore from the markets to meet their capital requirement in line with global risk norms, known as Basel-III.
- Distressing: reducing Bad loans or NPA.
- Empowerment: The government will strive to make it easier for PSBs to hire. Currently, PSBs have all the freedom to recruit at middle level and on contractual basis. They also want campus hiring, but there are some legal difficulties in that. The government is also looking at introducing Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOPs) for the PSU bank managements.
- Framework of accountability: A new framework of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the performance of PSBs is being announced. For example, capital ratios (CRAR-Capital to Risk weighted Assets Ratio/Common Equity Tier I ratio), Asset Quality (Net NPA ratio) etc.
- Governance reforms: Banks have been assured of "no interference policy", but at the same time asking them to have robust grievance redressal mechanism for borrowers, depositors as well as staff.

ANALYSIS:

CRISIL:

- It is a step forward but the implementation is still a cause to worry.
- The capital infusion of public sector banks is dependent on the market and performance of banks, which, in turn, will be a slow, multi-year process.

CAG REPORT:

- The Centre's 'Indradhanush' scheme to recapitalise public sector banks (PSBs) based on their performance was not followed during disbursal of funds.
- Also, some banks that did not qualify for additional capital as per the decided norms, were infused with capital, and in some cases, banks were infused with more capital than required.
- Most of the capital infused was consumed to tide over NPAs.

COMPARISON WITH PRIVATE BANKS:

- Nayak committee has said that the pvt. banks do better when it comes to independent directors but the argument is flawed as their directors are usually appointed by the promoter or major shareholder. While govt. appointed director is not beholden by the CEO so he is still relatively independent.

FINANCIAL SERVICES INSTITUTIONS BUREAU (FSIB):

The government has transformed Banks Board Bureau (BBB) into Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) by making some amendments.

- It will offer suggestions for the non-executive chairman of banks and other financial institutions as well as for the selection of full-time directors.
- It provides criteria for choosing the general managers and directors of general insurance businesses in the public sector.

RATIONALE OF THE CHANGE:

- Last year, the Delhi High Court stated that the bureau lacked the authority to suggest appointments at PSU general insurers.
- Despite the BBB's excellent work, recruitment at a higher level has been sluggish, necessitating an overhaul. Additionally, BBB's extended two-year tenure came to an end, and new hiring will only resume after a new body has been established.

Thus, there has been attempts to brings changes in the banking system in India, which will try to reform the issues. However as highlighted by the CAG report it is still a very long story.

Vikas Gupta

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Topic in news :- According to IISD (International Institute of Sustainable Development) study, Shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources could trigger financial challenges for developing countries like India, Russia, Brazil & China.

Important Points to be noted:-

- India is a net importer of petroleum products but it also earns revenues – via cesses, taxes from the consumption of petrol, diesel & oil.

- Public revenues from fossils fuel production and consumption currently account 18% in India.

What is renewable energy?

- A renewable energy means energy that is sustainable – something that can't run out, or is endless, like the solar, wind, hydro, tidal etc. Renewable energy is also referred to as 'alternative energy'. It means sources of energy that are alternative to the most commonly used non-renewable energy sources – like coal, crude oil etc. Renewable sources are sustainable, abundant, and environmentally friendly. Unlike fossil fuels, they are not going to expire soon as they are constantly replenished.

The most popular renewable energy sources currently are:

- Solar energy
- Wind energy
- Hydro energy
- Tidal energy
- Geothermal energy

- Biomass energy

ADVANTAGES OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

- Renewable energy will never run out :– Renewables energy resources come straight from the environment. The sun, the wind, the tide, the Earth's core will never run out. They are sustainable and abundant natural resources.

- Renewables save money and provide profitability :- Renewable energy is cost savings and resources available free of cost to all. Harnessing the power of the sun and wind provides for hundreds of thousands in savings.

- Reduce carbon footprint :- Renewable sources of energy don't release carbon dioxide or other harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. Hence it will reduce carbon footprint.

- Reduce dependence on foreign energy sources :- Renewable energy is local energy. Those countries utilising renewable energy could become self-reliant & reduce their dependence on foreign energy sources.

LIMITATIONS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

- High initial capital investment for renewable energy :- Manufacture, building, planning and installation of solar panels, wind turbines, hydroelectricity plants and other facilities required a huge capital investment.

- Geographic limitations of renewable energy :- Renewable energy totally depends upon geographic location. Example:- For solar energy in India states like Gujarat, Rajasthan are more suitable as compared to H.P, Uttarakhand. Renewable energy is totally dependent upon the weather, variations in the weather are also not suitable for renewable technology.

INDIA INITIATIVE FOR THE PROMOTION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

- International Solar Alliance (ISA) :- ISA was announced by Mr. Narendra Modi, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India and Mr. Francois Hollande, former Hon'ble President of France on 30th November 2015, at the 21st session of United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-21) in Paris, France. It is a treaty-based international intergovernmental organization, having aims of mobilizing more than USD 1000 billion of investment needed by 2030 for the massive deployment of solar energy. ISA's objective is to scale up solar energy, reduce the cost of solar power generation through aggregation of demand for solar finance, technologies, innovation, research and development, and capacity building.

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), India had committed to achieving 40% of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil energy sources by 2030. India has achieved this target in November 2021 itself. The country's installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity stands at 150.54 GW (solar: 48.55 GW, wind: 40.03 GW, Small hydro Power:

4.83, Bio-power: 10.62, Large Hydro: 46.51 GW) as on 30.11.2021.

- **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM):** To provide energy and water security, de-dieselise the farm sector and also generate additional income for farmers by producing solar power, Government launched PM-KUSUM Scheme for farmers. The Scheme consists of three components: Component A: Installation of 10,000 MW of Decentralized Grid Connected Solar Power Plants each of capacity up to 2 MW. Component B: Setting up of 20 lakh standalone Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps. Component C: Solarisation of 15 Lakh existing Grid-connected Agriculture Pumps.

Anoop Singh

Artificial Intelligence

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

- Topic in News :- AI- based Mandarin translation devices for Army (THE HINDU)

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS:-

- It is an offline hand-held language translation system which works based on AI.
- It is bidirectional with a range of 5-10 feet and gives converts Mandarin to English
- Defence Minister unveils 75 AI-based products & technology at defence symposium.

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE? THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Artificial intelligence (AI) is the branch of computer science concerned with making computers behave like humans. So that it could perform cognitive tasks like thinking, learning, problem solving, decision making etc
- Artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology that could mimic human intelligence.
- AI is being used today across different industries from finance to healthcare.
- AI has evolved in ways that far exceed its original conception. With incredible advances made in data collection, processing and computation power.

- AI's capabilities have enhanced, that's why its utility is growing in diverse fields.

APPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- In the E- Commerce sector, AI utilization enhances in different ways like Personalized Shopping, AI- powered assistants like chatbots.

- Facial Recognition techniques devices like mobile, laptops & PCs.

- Automobile manufacturing companies like Audi, Toyota and Tesla use AI's to train computers to think and evolve like humans which will be applicable in driving vehicles in any environment and to detect objects to avoid accidents.

- The AI system makes it easier for users by automatically detecting the number of lanes, road types and obstructions on the roads. Now AI is used by Uber and many logistics companies to enhance their operational efficiency, analyze road traffic, and optimize routes. The Hindu Analysis

- In personalized learning AI technology can be used to monitor students' data thoroughly, lesson plans, reminders, study guides, flash notes, revision, etc.

- In the Agriculture sector also, Artificial Intelligence is used to identify defects and nutrient deficiencies in the soil. This is be done by using computer vision, robotics, and machine learning applications.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)STARTUPS PRIVATE COMPANIES ARE : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Tata Elxsi
- Bosch
- Happiest Mind
- Zensar Technologies
- Oracle

FOLLOWING INITIATIVE TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA IN THE FIELD OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has initiated a programme titled FutureSkills PRIME in collaboration with NASSCOM, a B2C framework for re-skilling/ up-skilling IT professionals in 10 Emerging areas including Artificial Intelligence.

- Published the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in June 2018 and also proposes to develop an ecosystem for the research and adoption of Artificial Intelligence i.e. #AI FOR ALL. The Hindu Analysis

- Launched 'National AI Portal' which is a repository of Artificial Intelligence (AI) based initiatives in the country at a single place.

- Government has initiated 'Visvesvaraya PhD Scheme' with an objective to enhance the number of PhDs in Electronics System Design & Manufacturing (ESDM) and IT/IT Enabled Services (IT/ITES) sectors in the country. The research areas under the scheme include Artificial Intelligence (covering 82 PhD fellows) and Machine Learning (covering 59 PhD fellows).

- National Programme on Responsible Use of AI for Youth: With the objective to empower the youth to become AI ready and help reduce the skill gap, the government along with Industry partners has started this initiative to promote AI awareness among Government school going children.

- GoI has also joined the league of leading economies like USA, UK, EU, Australia, Canada, etc as a founding member of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI). The Hindu Analysis

- Government organized Responsible AI for Social Empowerment (RAISE) in 2020, a first-of-its-kind global meeting of minds on Artificial Intelligence to drive India's vision and roadmap for social transformation, inclusion and empowerment through responsible AI..

Anoop Singh

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE (JWST)

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE (JWST) – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

- Topic in News :- NASA unveiled images of the Southern Ring Nebula, taken from the James Webb Space Telescope. (THE HINDU)

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS :-

- James Webb Space Telescope is the largest and most powerful orbital observatory ever launched.

- Cost of construction is $ 9 billion and it is an infrared telescope.

- It was launched on December-25-2021 and reached its destination in solar orbit nearly 1 million miles from Earth a month later.

NEBULAE : The Hindu Analysis

- It is a cluster of stars & gaseous clouds.

- It is an interstellar cloud of dust, hydrogen, helium and other ionized gasses.

- The dust and gasses in a nebula are spread out, but due to gravity it begins to pull together and form clumps of dust and gas. When these clumps get bigger and bigger, their gravity enhances. The Hindu Analysis

- Eventually, these clump of dust and gas gets so big that it collapses from its own gravity and it causes the material at the center of the cloud to heat up-and this hot core is the beginning of a star.

- The closest known nebula to Earth is called the Helix Nebula. It is approximately 700 light-years away from Earth.

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE (JWST) : The Hindu Analysis

- JWST's developed by joint collaboration of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), European Space Agency (ESA) and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

- It was launched in December 2021 on an Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou, French Guiana. The Hindu Analysis

- It reached orbit at the Sun-Earth L2 Lagrange point in January 2022.

- It is designed primarily for near-infrared astronomy, but can also view orange & red visible light and mid-infrared region, depending on the instrument.

- It is the most powerful infrared telescope.

- It is also considered as the successor of the Hubble Telescope.

- The telescope will study across the fields of astronomy & cosmology such as stars, formation of galaxies, exoplanets etc. The Hindu Analysis

- Telescope is named after James E. Webb, who was the administrator of NASA from 1961 to 1968 during the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs.

SOUTHERN RING NEBULA (SRN) : The Hindu Analysis

- SRN also known as NGC 3132, Eight-Burst Nebula, or Caldwell 74.

- It is a bright and extensively studied planetary nebula in the constellation Vela.

- Its distance from Earth is estimated at about 613 pc. or 2,000 light-years.

Anoop Singh

Financial Stability Report – An analysis of the financial system in India

- Financial stability may be disturbed by processes from both – inside and outside of the financial sector leading to the emergence of weak spots like excessive leverage; dealing in doubtful products like collateralized debt securities (CDS), regulatory lapses and inadequate safeguards prescribed by law and other.

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

HOW INDIAN BANKS SURVIVE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS?

- Indian banks are well-regulated through proper supervision.
- They are well capitalized through capital adequacy ratio according to BIS.
- Calibrated globalization.

POST-LEHMAN : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Maintaining and monitoring financial stability has always been a key objective of monetary policy. However, it was only from 2008 crisis that the government and the RBI sought to institutionalise the process.

RBI TRACKS THE FOLLOWING PARAMETERS TO MAINTAIN FINANCIAL STABILITY : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Excessive volatility in interest rates.
- Exchange rates.
- Asset prices.
- Signs of excess leverage (borrowings) in the financial sector by Companies and households.
- The unregulated parts of the financial sector.

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA (RBI) RELEASED ITS BI-ANNUAL FINANCIAL STABILITY REPORT (FSR) : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- On NPA: The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio declining from 7.4 per cent in March 2021 to a six-year low of 5.9 per cent in March 2022 due to recoveries, write-offs and reduction in slippages.

- Provisioning coverage ratio (PCR): It improved to 70. 9 per cent in March 2022 from 67.6 per cent a year ago.

- Banks, as well as non-banking financial institutions, have sufficient capital buffers to withstand shocks, and support from it during Covid helped banks arrest their GNPA ratio.

About Provisioning coverage ratio (PCR) : The Hindu Analysis

- It is the portion of money a bank reserves for losses brought on by bad loans. For banks to protect themselves from losses if the NPAs start rising more quickly, a high PCR can be advantageous.

Concerns Raised : The Hindu Analysis

Global spillover: US rate increase and the threat of recession; Ukrain crisis; Oil price rise.

Fintech:

- It has exposed the banking system to new risks such as safeguarding of data privacy, cyber security, consumer protection, competition and compliance with AML (anti-money laundering) policies.

The Indian fintech industry —is amongst the fastest growing Fintech markets in the world. The Hindu Analysis

- India has the highest fintech adoption rate globally (87 per cent).

Risk from BigTechs (big technology firms):

- They can scale up rapidly and pose risk to financial stability, which can arise from increased disintermediation of incumbent institutions.

- Moreover, complex intertwined operational linkages between BigTech firms and financial institutions could lead to concentration and contagion risks and issues relating to potential anti-competitive behaviour.

- Cryptocurrencies are termed as a "clear danger" and anything that derives value based on make-believe, without any underlying, is just "speculation under a sophisticated name".

- Thus, financial stability report gives a glimpse about the financial stability of the Indian economic system highlighting the measures that could be taken by the government and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ensure that the Indian economic system doesn't face the instability akin to 2008 crisis situation.

Vikas Gupta

The Gold Ecosystem in India – Success and Failures

The Gold Ecosystem in India – Success and Failures – Today Current Affairs

Gold has a very important place not just in the cultural milieu in India, but also in the economy. It is a commonly held perception that marriages in India are incomplete without gold jewellery. This close relationship with gold may be viewed not just from the perspective of tradition but in economic terms as well. So, government thought of bringing a gold scheme to tap this underlaying potential asset of India.

Today Current Affairs

Salient features of the Gold Monetisation Scheme :

The scheme will replace the prevailing gold deposit scheme, which started in 1999.

Minimum deposit at any one time shall be gold (bars, coins, jewellery excluding stones and other metals). There is no maximum limit. This gold will then earn interest based on gold weight and also the appreciation of the metal value.

Time period: The designated banks will accept gold deposits under the short term (1-3 years) Bank Deposit (STBD) as well as medium (5-7 years) and long (12-15 years) term government deposits.

All scheduled commercial banks are allowed to implement this scheme and are also free to fix interest rates.

Depositors can also make premature withdrawal of their deposits, subjected to a minimum lock-in period and penalty to be determined by individual banks.

All residents Indians can invest.

Recent Efforts by the RBI and the government : The Hindu Analysis

Reserve Bank of India has allowed central and state governments and entities owned by them to deposit gold under its Gold Monetization Scheme.

Furthermore, charitable institutions have also been made eligible to deposit gold with banks.

Performance of the scheme : The Hindu Analysis

The scheme has got lacklustre response largely because of

- Psychological issues like gold are perceived to be more useful than any other asset.
- Structural deficiencies like low interest rates (2-3%) offered and unaccounted money will bring questions.
- Lack of social engineering because most of the gold is in form of jewellery and carries a lot of sentimental value. Moreover, it allows women to get some sort of control over ownership and inheritance.

Recommendation to mainstream the use of gold : The Hindu Analysis

Examine the rate of interest being offered as well as the lock-in period.

Many households might prefer private schemes, which allow them to get back the gold in form of jewellery as opposed to the government's scheme which offers cash or solid gold. The Hindu Analysis

To incentivise collection of gold, the commission that is being offered to commercial banks 2.5% — could also be offered to select jewellers.

Finally, and most importantly, it is necessary to undertake household-level surveys to determine the attitude of households towards gold in different parts of India, and then focus on a strategy to collect gold under the scheme.

Recommendation of the Niti Aayog Panel of the Gold Ecosystem : The Hindu Analysis

The major recommendations of this Committee, evolved through the above process, are structured into five key focus areas.

- These are Make in India in Gold
- Financialization of Gold
- Tax and Duty Structure
- Regulatory Infrastructure and Skill Development
- Technology Upgradation

Thus, gold can serve as a very important source of not only psychological security but also economic activity there by enabling the earning of profit and carrying new entrepreneurial adventures.

Vikas Gupta

Sedition – a curse on Indian Democracy

Section 124A of the IPC says that anyone either by words or by signs, or otherwise attempts to bring any hatred or contempt or excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India shall be punished with life imprisonment.

- The law was originally drafted by Thomas Macaulay to curb Wahabi Movement in Patna & Islamic Revivalist movement led by Syed Ahmed Barelvi. However, many Indian freedom fighters, including Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, were charged with sedition under the section.

- Sedition was part of reasonable restrictions under 19(2) in the draft constitution but was later on dropped on the suggestion of the K.M Munshi.

Today Current Affairs

NCRB Data:

- NCRB data has revealed that sedition cased has jumped twice since 2014. Still, it accounts for less than 0.01% of all IPC crimes. Assam and Jharkhand have emerged as sedition hotspot.

- In 2018, there were more than 1000 cases registered under UAPA in five states (Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Jharkhand and Manipur.

Mahatma Gandhi : The Hindu Analysis

Mahatma Gandhi described it as the "prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen."

Supreme Court judgements : The Hindu Analysis

- Kedernath vs. State of Bihar, 1962: The Court ruled that the mere criticism of the government or comments on the administration — however vigorous or ill-informed — is not sedition and that incitement to violence is the essential ingredient of that offence.

- In Balwant Singh v/s State of Punjab 1993: SC on the pro Khalistani Slogans, held that the casual raising of such slogans a couple of times by the individuals do not tantamount to sedition.

- Nazir Khan vs. NCT of Delhi, 2003: The court said that it is the fundamental right of every citizen to have his own political theories and ideas and to propagate them so long as he does not seek to do so by force and violence or contravene any provision of law.

Thus, shouting slogans like Pakistan or Khalistan zindabad, per se, would not attract Section 124-A. Even criticism of the SC judgment upholding the conviction of Afzal Guru also would not attract Section 124-A. However if a person has says "Hindustan Murdabad", or that it is necessary to overthrow Indian State, that could possibly amount to sedition. The Hindu Analysis

The problem is that it has often been misused by ill-informed and over enthusiastic prosecuting agencies who are against any criticism of the government. For example, Kanhaiya Kumar and Hardik Patel has been slapped with sedition charges. Also, in the year 2014, some of the Kashmiri students were charged with sedition for supporting Pakistan in a cricket match between India and Pakistan.

Pro : The Hindu Analysis

- This is an effective check and a safety valve.

Recent Evolution : The Hindu Analysis

S.G. Vombatkere Versus Union of India:

- In an interim order, the Court ordered the Centre and State governments not to file any FIRs under the aforementioned clause while it was being re-considered.
- All outstanding trials, appeals, and actions relating to charges brought under Section 124 A should be put on hold.

Opinions of Neera Chandhoke : The Hindu Analysis

Public universities are not a teaching shop but open spaces where students assemble and discuss political predicaments, with co-students of different regions of the country.

Through these activities, students become familiar with the notion of citizenship, they connect with others, they learn their constitutional right to challenge the power of elected representatives. It is in the university that they absorb the virtue of solidarity. It is here that they learn that in a democracy they have the right to make their own histories, even if they make these histories badly.

She believes that political equality is inadequate without social and economic equality. So she opines that students in past have been the agents of changes and they should raise voices to bring forth the ills of the society, and debate and discuss issues that affects the daily life without fear and favour.

Thus, the remedy does not lie in repealing Section 124-A. As there is no statutory provision which cannot be misused. The actual remedy is to lay down proper procedures to ensure legal compliance. As short term measures, following could be done:

- All speech-related offences should be made bailable and non-cognisable offences.

- In the case of hate speech, it is important to raise the burden of proof on those who claim that their sentiments are hurt rather than to accept them at face value.

Vikas gupta

The Draft National Policy on Disability

THE DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON DISABILITY – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

WHY IN NEWS?

The new draft national policy on people with disabilities has been released, and the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has requested public input (PwD).

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

STATUS OF PwD IN INDIA?

According to the 2011 Census, there are 2.68 crore people with disabilities, which means that 2.21 percent of Indians are disabled, compared to the global average of 15 percent.

According to the Census of 2011, the overall PwD population has a literacy rate of roughly 55 percent (males – 62 percent, females – 45 percent).

In terms of higher education, only 5% of PwD are graduate-level students.

Further census data from 2011 reveals that around 36% of all PwD are employed (male -47 percent , female-23 percent).

WHAT STEPS WERE TAKEN TO HELP PwD? THE HINDU ANALYSIS

For the purpose of fostering an inclusive environment for PwD, the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 was passed, which recognised 7 types of disabilities.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was developed by the Central Government in 2006 and is founded on the concepts of equality, freedom, justice, and respect for all people.

India joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a party in 2007. (UNCRPD).

The United Nations approved the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 with the aim of promoting inclusive and peaceful societies.

There are 21 different types of disability recognised by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The Hindu Analysis

India is a signatory to the "Incheon Strategy for Asia Pacific Decade for PwD: 2013-2022," which was created under the auspices of UNESCAP and lays out 10 objectives for the Asia-Pacific nations to achieve in order to promote the inclusion and empowerment of PwD.

The Unique Disability ID (UDID) project, which aims to create a national database for people with disabilities, has begun implementation by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

About the current draft : The Hindu Analysis

The draft was created by a committee under the direction of Anjali Bhawra, secretary of the Department of Empowerment of PwD.

Revision of the current policy: According to the Draft National Policy on PwD, 2021, the 2006 draft of the current national policy on disability called for a revision.

The draft went beyond the conventional causes of disability by including other elements, such as undernourishment, medical malpractice, socio-cultural problems, and impairment brought on by disasters.

Prevention: It asked for the creation of a thorough national prevention programme that would include both the risk cases of other diseases as well as the disabilities imposed by the RPD Act. The Hindu Analysis

According to the proposal, if disabilities in children were identified early enough, one-third of them could be avoided.

Permission and recognition of educational institutions: According to the policy, when granting permission or recognition to educational institutions, States and Union Territories should include a clause requiring compliance with the RPD Act.

Disability module—MBBS and other medical programmes should contain a disability module. The Hindu Analysis

Accessible vehicles: According to the requirements, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will issue the required instructions for modifying personal automobiles used by people with disabilities.

A specific commitment to education, health, skill development, employment, sports, culture, social security, accessibility, and other institutional processes is highlighted in the policy statement.

What challenges do PwDs encounter in terms of political inclusion? The Hindu Analysis

Political empowerment: The Incheon objectives, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and other initiatives encourage PwD participation in political debate and decision-making.

There is no policy commitment in India that aims to increase the political involvement of individuals with disabilities.

Disability marginalisation has been made worse by obstacles to party politics involvement and a lack of representation at the municipal, state, and federal levels. The Hindu Analysis

Voting accessibility issues: According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions are required to make sure that all polling places and the electoral process are accessible to people with disabilities.

However, not all polling places have wheelchair accessibility or even electronic voting machines that can read braille.

Lack of data: The marginalisation of handicapped persons is exacerbated by the absence of current aggregate statistics on the precise number of disabled people in each constituency.

The Hindu Analysis

Inadequate Representation: At all three tiers of government, there is not enough representation for people with disabilities.

Sadhan Gupta, the first visually impaired member of India's independent parliament, is hardly ever mentioned in discussions of politics or disabilities.

To increase participation, just a few States have started the project at the municipal level. The Hindu Analysis

For instance, Chhattisgarh initiated the nomination of at least one person with a disability in each panchayat.

Wha-t is the need of the hour? The Hindu Analysis

A four-pronged strategy can be used by the policy to attain political inclusivity.

Building the ability of organisations for disabled people and empowering their members via instruction in the political process and governmental framework

creation, modification, or abolition of legal and regulatory frameworks by lawmakers and electoral agencies to promote the involvement of the disabled in politics. The Hindu Analysis

the involvement of civil society in domestic election surveillance or voter education initiatives

Framework for political parties to effectively reach out to people with disabilities when drafting election campaign strategies and policy stances.

Vivek Raj

Issues with LQBTQIA++ health

What's the problem?

There must be comprehensive and long-term remedies for the mental diseases and difficulties that LGBTQIA++ persons in India experience.

LGBTQIA++: Who are they?

- The letters "L," "G," and "B" stand for sexual orientation, or the people to whom one is attracted, most frequently lesbian or homosexual people.
- Both men and women find bisexuals attractive.
- Anyone who identifies as a sex other than that with which they were born is considered transgender.
- The letter Q stands for queer and questioning.
- Queer is frequently used to identify oneself as a part of the LGBTQIA++ community, whereas Questioning is a name one may use to communicate they are investigating their identity and may not want to call themselves.
- The "I" refers to intersex, a condition in which a person has reproductive or sexual anatomy at birth that doesn't appear to conform to the stereotypical categories of female or male.
- Asexual people, or those who lack sexual desire, are referred to as "A."
- ++ denotes inclusiveness and openness.

Why do LGBTQIA++ populations continue to be at risk for chronic mental illnesses and difficulties?

- The Raahat Project, which has been focusing on using participatory approaches, has brought to light a number of difficulties that LGBTQIA++ populations regularly deal with in prestigious colleges.
- mental disease causes
- permanent discord
- ingrained stigma
- Discrimination Abuse
- pressure to embrace sexual orientation and gender norms
- Stigmatizing Internalized Homophobia's effects

WILDFIRES

WILDFIRES – Today Current Affairs

TOPIC IN NEWS :- Wildfires continue to spread in the Gironde region of southwestern France. (THE HINDU)

Today Current Affairs

Other Important Points

- Heatwaves engulf parts of southwest Europe.

- Scientists blame climate change and predict more frequent and intense episodes of extreme weather such as heatwaves and drought

- A study also published in the journal Environmental Research: Climate concluded it was highly probable that climate change was making heatwaves worse.

What is Wildfire ? The Hindu Analysis

- According to WHO " A wildfire is an unplanned fire that burns in a natural area such as a forest, grassland, or prairie. It caused by human activity or a natural phenomenon such as lightning, and they can happen at any time or anywhere." The risk of wildfires is enhanced in extremely dry conditions, such as drought and during high winds.

Causes of Wildfires : The Hindu Analysis

- Natural Causes :- Lightning, Volcanic eruption etc

- Human Causes :- Smoking, Unattended Campfires, Burning Debris, Fireworks, Machinery accidents

Effects of Wildfires: The Hindu Analysis

- Loss of Ecosystems and Biodiversity:- Wildfires destroy all flora and fauna leading to loss of ecosystems and biodiversity. Wildfires simply damage the habitable and adaptable land for specific animal and plant species. It affects or kills the plant life, features which support thousands of wildlife thereby forcing the animals out of the regions or even killing them.

- Air Pollution :- Forests, trees help to purify air by absorbing carbon dioxide, greenhouse gasses, and air impurities and later give off oxygen. When forests & trees are destroyed by fires, the quality of air declines and greenhouse gasses increase in the atmosphere leading to climate change and global warming. Also there is formation of the huge clouds of smoke instigated by wildfires that lead to massive air pollution. The Hindu Analysis

- Soil Degradation :- Forest soils consist of nutrients, minerals & beneficial microorganisms but burning of trees and vegetation destroy all these important components. As a result, soil becomes degraded.

- Forest Degradation :- Forest fires which normally happen in dry tropical forests are a major cause of forest degradation. Forest fires destroy thousands of acres of trees and vegetation. It will also impact the quality of certain forest features like soil fertility, biodiversity, and ecosystems etc.

- Economic Losses :- Wildfires destroy everything in their path including houses, buildings, property etc. Even the authorities, army, airplanes which are deployed to control the fires required huge costs.

Forest Fires in India : The Hindu Analysis

- Forest fires are a regular phenomenon in our country often observed during summers.

- About 52,785 forest fires were detected using MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectro-radiometer) sensor and 3,45,989 forest fires were detected using SNPP-VIIRS (Suomi-National Polar-orbiting Partnership – Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) in forest fire season from Nov 2020 to June 2021.

- More than 36% of the country's forest cover has been estimated to be prone to frequent forest fires. The Hindu Analysis

- Nearly 4 % of the country's forest cover is extremely prone to fire, whereas 6% of forest cover is found to be very highly fire prone.

- Based on the forest inventory records, 54.40% of forests in India are exposed to occasional fires, 7.49% to moderately frequent fires and 2.40% to high incidence levels.

- Satellite based remote sensing technology and GIS tools have been effective in better prevention and management of fires through creation of early warning for fire prone areas, monitoring fires on a real time basis and estimation of burn scars.

- In 2020, there was the introduction of forest fires danger rating and strengthening of the large forest fire monitoring system and FSI Van Agni Geo-portal.

Anoop Singh

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORT & IMPORT

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORT & IMPORT – Today Current Affairs

TOPIC IN NEWS :- INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS HAVE INCREASED SEVEN TIMES IN THE LAST EIGHT YEARS. (THE HINDU)

Today Current Affairs

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS :-

- India's defence imports have decreased by about 21% in the past four or five years.

- P.M Narendra Modi said the country is moving fast from being the "biggest defence importer to a big exporter". The Hindu Analysis

- Last year, India had achieved defence exports worth   13,000 crore and of this, 70% was from the private sector.

- The "SPRINT Challenges" were launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the aim of development of 75 indigenous technologies/products by the industry for induction into the Navy.

OTHERS IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT IN DEFENCE : The Hindu Analysis

- Big boost to 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' with induction of MBT Arjun Mk-1A in Army, LCA (Tejas) in IAF, ALH Mk-III in Indian Navy and ICG

- Around 100 bridges, roads, tunnels constructed by BRO inaugurated in 2021.

- The new Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 has been promulgated in October 2020 as an enabling document that lays emphasis on indigenous production and self-reliance under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative and further streamlines capital procurements for the Army. The Hindu Analysis

- Ministry of Defence has signed more than 180 contracts with the Indian industry between

June 2014 and December 2019, worth approximately $25.8 billion

- The Army Design Bureau (ADB), since its raising in 2017, has made major forays in supporting R&D/ harnessing technology with an extensive outreach to industry, academia and ushering a collaborative engagement with the technology providers, manufacturers and users.

SOURCE :- PIB

- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)- Report – 2022 : The Hindu Analysis

- During 2016-2020, 164 states were major arms importers. The five largest arms importer states were Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and China, which together accounted for 36% of total arms imports.

- The five largest exporters of arms in 2016-20 – the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China – accounted for 76% of the total volume of exports of major arms. The Hindu Analysis

- The nine nuclear-armed states are the U.S.A, Russia, U. K, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea —continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals.

- Total number of nuclear weapons declined slightly between January 2021 and January 2022.

- India had 160 nuclear warheads as of January 2022 and it appears to be expanding its nuclear arsenal. India's nuclear stockpile increased from 156 in January 2021 to 160 in January 2022. The Hindu Analysis

- As per the numbers of nuclear warheads India is at seventh position, after Russia, USA, China, France, UK, Pakistan.

- Russia and the USA together possess over 90% of all nuclear weapons.

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI) : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- It is an international institute based in Stockholm (Sweden)

- Type – Global Think Tank

- Formed in May-1966

- Dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arm control and disarmament.

- Provide data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

- Its publications and information material are distributed to a wide range of policy makers, researchers, journalists, organizations etc.

- Its financial support is primarily drawn from governments and independent philanthropic organizations around the world..

Anoop Singh

Minimum Support Price (MSP)

MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP) – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

- TOPIC IN NEWS :- Farmers' union rejected the Centre's invitation to join the committee, on the minimum support price and other issues in the farming sector. (THE HINDU)

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

WHAT IS MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP) ?

- MSP is the price set by the government for certain agricultural products, at which the products would directly be purchased from the farmers if the open market prices are less than the cost incurred.

- MSP is the rate at which the government purchases crops from farmers.

- It is based on a calculation of at least one-and-a-half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers.

- The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) recommends MSPs. It is an attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

OBJECTIVES OF SETTING UP MSP ARE : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- To support farmers from distress sales.

- To control the price of products.

- To procure food grains for public distribution.

FACTORS FOR RECOMMENDING THE MSP : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- The CACP considers various factors while recommending the MSP for particular commodity like:- cost of cultivation, Input-output price parity, Demand and supply, Trends in market prices, Effect on the cost of living, Effect on issue prices and implications for subsidy, Parity between prices paid and prices received by the farmers, International price, implications for consumers (inflation).

Crops under MSP : The Hindu Analysis

- CACP recommends MSPs for 22 mandated crops and fair & remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane.

- The mandated crops include 14 crops of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops and 2 other commercial crops.

Crops covered under MSP : The Hindu Analysis

- Cereals :- Barley, Bajra, Maize, Jowar ,Paddy, Ragi, wheat, ,

- Pulses :- Arhar/tur, Gram, Lentil, Moong, Urad

- Oilseeds :- Groundnut, Nigerseed , rapeseed/mustard, Soybean, , Sesamum, Sunflower seed, Safflower seed, Toria

- Copra, De-husked coconut, Raw cotton,Raw jute, Sugarcane (fair and remunerative price), Virginia flu cured (VFC) tobacco

Advantages of MSP : The Hindu Analysis

- MSP acts as a tool for the government to control a sharp fall and rise in crop prices.

- MSP acts as a security to farmers so that they get a fair amount for their products and also helps them sustain their losses, and does not affect them drastically.

- MSP helps to boost the morale and motivation of farmers by maintaining & giving the fair price of the crops they produce.

- MSP for these crops is also important so that more and more farmers are tempted to grow these crops with an assurance that they will recover a certain amount from the government guarantee.

- Government purchases the crops from farmers at MSP and further it is sold at government fair price shops at a price lower than the market rate. That will help the government make these crops available & affordable to the below poverty line people.

Anoop Singh

National Youth Policy

National Youth Policy – Today Current Affairs

TOPIC IN NEWS :

The Government has prepared a new draft of National Youth Policy, which has been placed in public domain

Associate Ministry: Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Sport is responsible for drafting and implantation of the Draft National Sports Policy.

The Government has reviewed the existing National Youth Policy, 2014 The policy would be finalized after deliberations on received suggestions/comments and multi stakeholders consultations.

The draft NYP envisages a ten-year vision for youth development that India seeks to achieve by 2030.

It is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and serves to 'unlock the potential of youth to advance India'.

The NYP seeks to catalyze widespread action on youth development on five priority areas viz. education; employment & entrepreneurship; youth leadership & development; health, fitness & sports; and social justice.

Each priority area is underpinned by the principle of social inclusion keeping in view of the marginalized sections.

THE DETAILS OF THE BENEFITS AND OBJECTIVES ENVISAGED IN THE DRAFT NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY ARE GIVEN BELOW : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

(i) The policy draws a detailed roadmap towards the vision outlined for the youth in the coming decade and delineates the actions within each priority area.

(ii) The policy envisions an education system in sync with National Education Policy, 2020 that imparts career opportunities and life skills to all young people.

It ensures that the youth have access to sustainable livelihood opportunities that encourages them to stay within and revive the rural economy, generate employment via micro-region-specific strategies, foster entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, and support the informal and emerging gig economy.

(iii) To develop India's youth, both men and women, as leaders of tomorrow, the policy

prescribes strengthening the volunteering ecosystem, expanding opportunities for leadership development and mobilizing technology to establish a vibrant youth enablement platform. The Hindu Analysis

Further efforts for the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged youths in volunteering and leadership opportunities are identified.

(iv) The health and well-being of the youth, especially young women of reproductive age, will be ensured by strengthening preventative and palliative healthcare, especially for mental health, substance abuse disorders and sexual and reproductive health issues that are critical among this demographic.

The policy purports a progressive and essential approach to mobilizing technology and data to improve healthcare delivery and specific interventions to provide the marginalized youth with access to quality healthcare.

The policy also proposes strengthening the overall fitness of youth by building a vibrant culture of sports and fitnss. The Hindu Analysis

(v) The policy outlines actions that will empower the youth and ensure their safety, strengthen the legal system for the quick delivery of justice and provide holistic support for the rehabilitation of juveniles.

Special efforts are prescribed to ensure social justice for marginalized and vulnerable youths.

(vi) The policy is a roadmap for the development of youth today to ensure a bright future for India tomorrow. This national-level framework will be adopted by states that will formulate their youth policies to serve the development needs of the region. The Hindu Analysis

The policy prescribes the necessary actions for various ministries in line with the respective thematic area.

This information was given by Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Shri Anurag Thakur in a written reply in Lok Sabha on 19th July 22.

Puneet Bhatia

Patent awarded for use of advanced automated system for Therapeutic Emesis

PATENT AWARDED FOR USE OF ADVANCED AUTOMATED SYSTEM FOR THERAPEUTIC EMESIS – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

- Ayurveda treatment by Therapeutic Emesis will now become Simple and Convenient

- The Ayush sector has been constantly attempting to use technology and new innovation for various Ayurveda therapies. An advanced automated system or instrument for Therapeutic Emesis has been developed, which will make this therapy simple and convenient. Dr. B Sreenivasa Prasad, President, Board of Ayurveda, National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) and his team of inventor were granted a patent for development of advanced automated system or instrument for Therapeutic Emesis by Controller of Patents, Government of India. The Hindu Analysis

- Panchakarma is the prime treatment modality in Ayurveda. Panchakarma are administered for prevention, management, cure as well as for rejuvenation purposes. Vamana (therapeutic emesis), virechana (therapeutic purgation), basti (therapeutic enema), nasya (therapy through nasal route and raktamokshana (blood letting therapy) are the five procedures under panchakarma.

- Vamana i.e., a therapeutic procedure that expels impurities or doshas through oral route. The procedure is tedious to administer for both patient and panchakarma expert consultant. Further handling the vomitus hygienically is a major challenge. Till now there is no technology developed to ease the procedure. The Hindu Analysis

- The present patented equipment 'Advanced Automated Equipment or System for Therapeutic Emesis' has been developed to administer the difficult Vamana procedure comfortably. This technology is equipped with monitors for monitoring of vital data of patients during the procedure. There is provision for handling the vomitus hygienically and as per biomedical waste management policy. It is also provided with an emergency kit that is required to manage complications of the procedure. Clinical parameters that are required to assess the procedure are also automated. In total this technology is the complete solution for administering the Vamana procedure comfortably.

- This Product has been developed by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Ayurtech Incubation Center of KLE Ayurworld and KLE Engineering college at Belagavi, Karnataka. The Technology was amongst Top 10 at IICDC 2018 and Incubate at NSRCEL, IIM Bangalore and supported by DST and Texas Instruments. The Hindu Analysis

- This advanced automated system will help the Ayurveda fraternity in teaching and

practicing Ayurveda with use of technology. Going forward commercialization of this invention is also being looked into, so that it can be used across hospitals in the country.

Puneet Bhatia

School Health Services Modernization

School Health Services Modernization – Today Current Affairs

GS Paper-II, Polity,Constitution,Governance,Social Justice and International Relations) Source: The Hindu

Today Current Affairs

What's the problem?

After a protracted closure in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, children across India are returning to school for in-person instruction.

Therefore, it is time for practical policy initiatives and actions aimed at schoolchildren.

What is the current issue? The Hindu Analysis

Because health-care needs are linked with medical needs, school health programmes sometimes receive little governmental attention.

Despite having a low overall incidence of illness (and hence less needs for medical treatment), children of school age do have a variety of age-specific health needs. The Hindu Analysis

These health requirements are related to unhealthful eating patterns, erratic sleeping patterns, insufficient exercise, mental, dental, and vision issues, sexual behaviour, and the use of cigarettes and other drugs, addiction, etc.

Then, it is recognised that the lifestyle choices made and the health knowledge acquired while still in school will persist into adulthood and serve as the basis for their future conduct.

How did India's school health services develop? The Hindu Analysis

The first known instance of school health care in India dates back to 1909, when the then-presidency of Baroda started examining students for medical conditions.

In 1946, the Sir Joseph Bhore committee noted that India's school health services were inadequate and essentially nonexistent. The Hindu Analysis

The Government of India's secondary education committee suggested extensive policy changes in 1953 that addressed school nutrition and health initiatives.

As a result, a few carefully chosen States oversaw programmatic initiatives with a primary focus on nutrition.

What exactly is the FRESH method? The Hindu Analysis

Lack of knowledge and clarity regarding what defines well-functioning and efficient school health services is one of the causes of improperly planned school health services.

Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH) is an inter-agency framework that was released by the World Bank, UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

Four primary topics and three auxiliary strategies are suggested by the FRESH framework and tools. The Hindu Analysis

According to the key areas, school health services should concentrate on water, sanitation, and environmental policy as well as skills-based health education, school-based health, and nutrition services.

Effective collaborations between the health and education sectors, community partnerships, and student involvement are among the supporting strategies.

What further rules exist? The Hindu Analysis

US CDC – According to the recommendations made by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, school health services should concentrate on four key areas.

Acute and emergency treatment, family involvement, chronic illness management, and care

coordination are these four areas. The Hindu Analysis

WHO – The WHO recommends that local need assessments be used to guide the development of school health services.

Health promotion, health education, screening that leads to care and/or referral, and support should all be included.

The goal of school health services must be the promotion of good health, prevention of disease, early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up, raising children's health awareness, and making it possible to provide a healthy learning environment. The Hindu Analysis

As part of the health-promoting schools (HPS) effort, these strategies have been effectively applied in numerous nations.

What potential exists for reopening schools? The Hindu Analysis

There is a need and an opportunity for a proactive approach to having increased and strengthened school health services once schools reopen to their full capacity. Here are some recommendations.

Every Indian State must assess the situation, develop a plan for improving school health services, and include a specific schedule and funding allocation.

The health sector grant from the Fifteenth Finance Commission should and might be used as leverage.Construct the current infrastructure for school health; the renewed emphasis must include all-inclusive, preventative, promotive, and curative services with a functional referral connection. The Hindu Analysis

Just like physical activity sessions are a part of teaching, health discussions and lifestyle sessions (conducted by schoolteachers and invited medical and health experts) should be included.

Online consultations for physical and mental health issues should be added to school health clinics. This may serve as a crucial springboard for de-stigmatizing mental health care. The role of parents should be expanded, as should their involvement, particularly through parent-teacher conferences.

- Most of the time, private schools are not included in the government's programmes for school health care.
- Children attending both government-run and private schools should be cared for by school health services. The Hindu Analysis
- Early in 2020, the Ayushman Bharat programme launched a school health project, but its execution is not up to par.

This effort has to be reviewed, the budget committed to it needs to be increased to bring in more human resources, and performance monitoring based on actual outcome indicators is needed. The duty to maintain the children's health and education falls on elected officials, professional associations of public health, and paediatricians. According to reports, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has suggested routine health screenings for kids.

What follows? The Hindu Analysis

Every Indian State's health policy makers and programme managers are responsible for acting in the children's best interests at all times.

Every Indian State's Education and Health Departments must collaborate to improve school health services. The Hindu Analysis

To guarantee better health and high-quality education for every child, it is important to bring together children, parents, teachers, experts in the health and education sectors, and the Departments of Health and Education.

Comprehensive school health services shall be made available in every Indian State as a result of the convergence of the National Health Policy, 2017, and National Education Policy, 2020.

Vivek Raj

Protests against the new "National Emblem"

Protests against the new "National Emblem" – Today Current Affairs

GS Paper-II, Polity,Constitution,Governance,Social Justice and International Relations)

Today Current Affairs

What's the problem?

Many people have been dismayed with the new emblem's purported portrayal errors after getting their first glimpse of it atop the new Parliament Building.

What specifics are there regarding the new emblem? The Hindu Analysis

This new, 6.5-meter-tall metal insignia is a component of the Central Vista Project. Sunil Deore and Romiel Moses were in charge of its design.

The new logo is displayed at the centre of the new Parliament building's Central Foyer.

In contrast to the majesty and glory of the original, the lions on the new emblem are observed to be "mad," with their teeth exposed.

What is the background of the national anthem? The Hindu Analysis

The Lion Capital of Mauryan emperor Asoka at Sarnath is adapted in the national anthem.It was constructed around 250 BC to honour Gautama Buddha's alleged first discourse in which he taught the Four Noble Truths of life.

In the original, a circular abacus stands on a bell-shaped lotus, which is itself supported by four Asiatic lions mounted back to back.

The polished sandstone sculpture, which stood 7 feet tall, symbolised strength, courage, and pride. The Hindu Analysis

An elephant, a horse, a bull, and a lion are shown in high relief on the abacus's freeze as they move clockwise.

On all four sides, Dharma Chakras or wheels that stand in for the Buddhist Dharmachakra separate these creatures.

Buddhism's emblem, the inverted lotus, was used to support this abacus.

History: Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang left behind a thorough description of the pillar in his writings. The Hindu Analysis

Asoka used the pillar as part of his strategy to disseminate Buddha's teachings.

Why did the Sarnath pillar become the country's symbol? The Hindu Analysis

The Sarnath pillar was chosen by the Constituent Assembly as the country's flag because it symbolised the strength, bravery, and self-assurance of a free people.

The logo features a 2-D sculpture with the Devanagari-scripted words Satyameva Jayate (truth alone prevails), which are borrowed from the Mundaka Upanishad, written beneath it. The Hindu Analysis

The insignia was made by five of renowned artist Nandalal Bose's pupils.

The Lion Capital of Ashoka in Sarnath was made the official national symbol of India on January 26, 1950.The emblem serves as the Republic of India's seal.

What is the current replica's controversy? The Hindu Analysis

The lions in the most recent reproduction appeared "too fierce," which amounted to altering the original in a haste to fulfil the Central Vista Project deadline.The original symbol is expressionless.The designers responded to complaints that the lions appeared violent by stating that perspective was the key.The new representation is 6.5 m high as opposed to the original structure's 1.6 m height.

Additionally, the most recent representation is 33 metres above ground level, although the original Lion Capital was at ground level.

Vivek Raj

In 5 years, PM Fasal Bima brought in 40,000 crore for insurance businesses

Since its launch in 2016–17, the Center's flagship crop insurance programme has generated approximately Rs 40,000 crore for insurance companies.

Today Current Affairs

PMFBY: Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- Launched in 2016, the PMFBY programme is an insurance service for farmers' yields that is run by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- The One Nation One Scheme ethos is adhered to by the new crop insurance programme.
- The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and the Modified NAIS were superseded by the PMFBY.
- It offers all of the advantages of earlier plans while doing away with all of their drawbacks. The Hindu Analysis
- Goals: To offer farmers insurance protection and financial assistance in the event that any of the registered crops fail due to natural disasters, pests, or illnesses.
- Help stabilize farmers' incomes and ensure their ability to continue farming.
- To motivate farmers to implement cutting-edge and contemporary agricultural practices.
- To make sure that financing is flowing to the agricultural sector.

Important details: Farmers will be required to pay a consistent premium of just 2 percent for all Kharif crops and 1.5 percent for all Rabi crops (winter sown) and they are required to pay a premium of 5% for yearly commercial and horticultural crops.

Farmers must pay very modest premium rates, and the government will cover the remainder (to be shared equally by central and state governments).

The goal is to give farmers a fully insured sum to protect them against crop loss due to natural disasters. The Hindu Analysis

The "Area Approach" will be used to implement the Scheme, with Defined Areas for each listed crop in the case of widespread catastrophes

For important crops, the insurance unit must be at the village/village panchayat level, while

for other crops, it may be at a size above village/village panchayat level. The Hindu Analysis

All covered farmers within a unit of insurance—which will be referred to as a "Notified Area" for a crop—are thought to have comparable risk exposures.

The amount of government aid is unlimited. This means that the government will be responsible for paying the remainder of the premium, even if it is 90%.

The usage of technology will be strongly promoted. Smartphones will be used, for instance, to record and upload information about crop cutting in order to shorten the time it takes to pay farmers for their claims. The Hindu Analysis

The number of crop cutting tests will be decreased by the use of remote sensing.

All services engaged in the implementation of the scheme will not be subject to Service Tax.

Beneficiaries (farmers to be covered): All farmers who have an insurable interest in notified crops during the season and are growing those crops in notified areas are eligible.

The programme has been made voluntary for all farmers starting in Kharif 2020 in response to farmer demand. The Hindu Analysis

For farmers who have a Crop Loan account or a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) account, for example, enrollment used to be required.

Risks included in the plan: Comprehensive risk insurance is offered to cover yield losses brought on by unavoidable risks including natural fire and lightning, storm, hailstorm, cyclone, typhoon, tempest, hurricane, and tornado.

Risks related to drought, dry spells, pests, diseases, flood, inundation, and landslides will also be covered. The Hindu Analysis

Indemnity claims up to a maximum of 25% of the sum-covered may be made in situations where the majority of insured farmers in a notified region have the intention to sow or plant and have spent money for the purpose, but are unable to do so because of unfavourable weather circumstances.

For crops retained in "cut & spread" condition to dry in the field after harvest, covering will be provided up to a maximum of 14 days after harvest.

Identified localised hazards like hailstorm, landslide, and inundation that affect isolated farms in the notified region would also be covered in terms of loss and damage.

EVALUATION OF THE PLAN : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

In its first year of operation (2016–17), when it covered 30% of Gross Cropped Area, the programme was well appreciated by farmers (GCA).

GCA dropped to 25% in 2019-2020 and to 27% in 2018-19, indicating a decline in popularity. The Hindu Analysis

A few states, including Bihar, West Bengal, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh (which recently re-entered), and Telangana, chose not to participate in the scheme during its various implementation years, while Punjab never joined it..

Vikas Gupta

Central Bank Digital Currency

CENTRAL BANK DIGITAL CURRENCY – TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Recent Event: The CBDC is now being phased-in by RBI for the wholesale and retail markets.

TODAY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FEATURES:

- For social assistance and other specific payments in a nation.
- CBDCs might be used to send money across borders more quickly.
- A CBDC's universal access features may also offer an offline payment option, bridging the digital gap and promoting inclusive development.
- Immediate financing to micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) in India may be feasible.

About CBDC : The Hindu Analysis

- It is also known as a national digital money, is merely the fiat currency of a nation in digital form.
- The central bank releases electronic tokens rather than producing paper money or striking coins. The Hindu Analysis
- CBDC is not comparable with private virtual currencies or cryptocurrencies. This token value is backed by the full confidence and credit of the government. It will be a digital money backed by a government.

Recent steps towards CBDC : The Hindu Analysis

- The introduction of CBDC was announced in the Union Budget 2022-23.
- Government amended section of the RBI Act, 1934 through the Finance Bill 2022.
- India's official digital currency is likely to debut by early 2023.

Crypto-Currency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 : The Hindu Analysis

- This bill prohibits all private cryptocurrencies and provides for an official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Government officials and experts argue cryptocurrency prices are too volatile to serve as a fiat currency. The Hindu Analysis
- The Supreme Court has set aside a 2018 circular of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that prohibited banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies (VCs).

What is Block-chains? The Hindu Analysis

Block chains are a cryptographic data Ledger, that is distributed across the network. It can also be used for transfer of any data or digital asset like cryptocurrencies without the need for central authorisation like RBI for Indian rupee, by achieving consensus among distributed nodes. The present block chain ecosystem is like the early Internet.

How is it different from current payment systems? The Hindu Analysis

Block chain technology allows, instant recognition of the exact size of the block by all transacting parties in the chain since the block is simultaneously updated on all databases, and carries a digital signature that do not allow tampering with the definition of the block. Therefore, it creates instant trust without having to rely on a series of trustworthy banks to clear cheques.

Benefits of block chain technology : The Hindu Analysis

- As all transactions are authorized by all miners simultaneously, thus the transactions are inert to hacking.
- Block chain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.

Concerns associated : The Hindu Analysis

- Block chain is still a (relatively) new technology and there are concerns about the privacy.
- Block chain-based cryptocurrencies like bitcoin are threat to security of nations worldwide due to their increasing use in terrorism, child pornography, drugs etc.
- Banks are also at threat of losing significance with the increasing use of Block chains.

Use in govt. services : The Hindu Analysis

- Can be used for monetary transactions without any central authority and without any worry of cyber-attacks due to non-availability of a single point of focus.
- The ledger can be tweaked to create hierarchies with a suitably tailored degree of access thus create a modifying authority to each level. Example in land records.

However, the initial cost of transitioning to such a unique architecture can be high. Also, the identification of hierarchies is difficult. Most of all, there will be resistance from government staff to the massive shift in state-citizen interaction ushered in by block chain technology.

Vikas Gupta

Ports and Development – issues and solutions

Ports and Development – issues and solutions – Today Current Affairs

Recent Event: Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNP) has become the first major 100% landlord port in India, having all berths being operated on the PPP model.

Today Current Affairs

Landlord Port Model:

- Ownership of the port remains with port authority. Infrastructure is leased to private firms that provide and maintain their own superstructure and install own equipment to

handle cargo.

- In return, the landlord gets a share of the revenue from the private entity.

Service Port Model : The Hindu Analysis

Port authority owns the land and all available assets – fixed and mobile – and performs all regulatory and port functions. The port trust is both landlord and the cargo terminal operator.

Issues with the ports : The Hindu Analysis

- There is a time delay in leasing out the land to Private operators largely because of the involvement of multiple agencies.
- Presently there is no independent board to look into disputes between stakeholders.

Major Port Authorities Bill 2020 : The Hindu Analysis

Proposed to replace more than the 5-decade old Major Port Trust Act 1963 to enable port authorities to function like a corporate entity by ensuring more autonomy and flexibility to improve governance and reduce the litigations between Public Private Partnership operators and Ports.

- The Bill will apply to the major ports. The central government may notify more major ports.
- Board of Port Authority (BPA): The role of Tariff Authority for Major Ports [TAMP] has been redefined. Now, Board of Port Authority (BPA) has been given powers to fix tariff for the purposes of bidding for PPP projects. The Hindu Analysis

  - The Board can use any property, assets and funds under the port for the development of the major port including the leasing of the land.
  - Under the 1963 Act, the Board had to seek prior sanction of the central government to raise any loan. Under the Bill, the Board may raise loans (less than 50% of its capital reserves) without the assent of central government. For loans above 50% of its capital reserves, the Board will require prior sanction of the central government.

- Independent Review Board (IRB): It will be setup to look out the residual function of the Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP), disputes between ports and concessionaries, review the stressed PPP projects. At present, there is no independent body to look into these aspects.

India has been following the service port model which is consistent with centralized economy. However, globally landlord port model is followed which is consistent with market-oriented economy. This resulted in conflict of interest between the port trusts and the private sector, with the former acting both as port regulators and providers of commercial services in many instances. So, there is urgent need for smooth transition to landlord port model to increase their efficiency.

Vikas Gupta

EIA Amendment Rules – A case for development or disaster

EIA Amendment Rules – A case for development or disaster – Today Current Affairs

News: The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has notified amendment to the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Rules.

Today Current Affairs

- Strategic and defense-related highway projects are excluded from environmental review including those located at least 100 kilometres from the Line of Control.
- It will eliminate the requirement of new permission for the contentious Char Dham project's construction (connectivity to Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri, and Gangotri shrines).
- Thermal power plants up to 15 MW that run on biomass or non-hazardous municipal solid waste and use auxiliary fuels like coal, lignite, or petroleum products up to 15% are also exempt from this rule.
- Ports that only handle fish and serve small fisherman will not need to get environmental clearance.

About EIA : The Hindu Analysis

Environment Impact Assessment Notification of 2006 has decentralised the environmental clearance projects by categorizing the developmental projects in two categories. i.e., Category A and Category B. Category A projects are appraised at national level and Category B projects are apprised at state level.

- Category A projects require mandatory environmental clearances so they do not undergo the screening process.
- While, Category B projects undergoes screening process and they are classified into two types.
- Category B1 projects (Mandatory requires EIA).
- Category B2 projects (Do not require EIA).

EIA CYCLE COMPRISES OF 4 STAGES : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Screening: Screening is done to see whether a project requires environmental clearance as per the statutory notifications.
- Scoping: Scoping is a process of detailing the terms of reference of EIA. Ministry of Environment and Forests has published sector-wise guidelines, which outline the significant issues which has to be addressed in the EIA studies.
- Public hearing: Law requires that the public must be informed and consulted on a proposed project after the completion of EIA report. Any one likely to be affected by the proposed project is entitled to have access to the Executive Summary of the EIA.
- Appraisal.

Draft EIA 2020: The key points of dispute raised by UN Special Rapporteurs (independent experts working on behalf of the United Nations) are:

It categorizes the projects and activities into 3 categories A, B1, B2. However, it excludes any project of "Strategic Nature" like Waterways, NHs etc.

- It shortens the period of public consultation hearings to 40 days maximum and also reduces the time available to public to submit their responses on any application seeking environmental clearance from 30 to 20 days.
- It also allows the declaration of some areas as "ecologically sensitive areas" without a public hearing or environmental clearance, and several "red" and "orange" classified toxic industries could now operate as close as 0-5 km from a Protected Area. The Hindu Analysis
- The increased validity of the environment clearances for mining projects (50 years versus 30 years currently) and river valley projects (15 years versus 10 years currently).
- The most devastating blow to the EIA regime is the creation of an ex-post-facto clearance. Under this, when an EIA clearance is not sought or not granted, and the construction of the project had already taken place, then the project proponent can enter an assessment procedure to determine fines for the violations. The Hindu Analysis

Thus, it appears that the current government is rooted in Neo-Liberal governance and

therefore there are attempts to compromise the environment for the sake of development.

Vikas Gupta

Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022

INDIAN **A**NTARCTIC **B**ILL, 2022 – **T**ODAY **C**URRENT **A**FFAIRS

TOPIC **I**N **N**EWS : **I**NDIAN **A**NTARCTIC **B**ILL 2022

Why In News : Lok Sabha passes the Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022 aimed at having India's own national measures for protecting the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystem.

Aim of the Bill : Introducing the Bill in Lok Sabha, Union Minister of Earth Sciences Dr. Jitendra Singh says, it provides harmonious policy and regulatory framework for India's Antarctic activities through well-established legal mechanism

Ministry Involve : The Bill proposes to set-up Indian Antarctic Authority (IAA) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences as the apex decision making authority

Lok Sabha today passed the Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022 moved by Minister of Earth Sciences Dr. Jitendra Singh. The Bill aims at having India's own national measures for protecting the Antarctic environment as also the dependent and associated ecosystem.

The main aim is to ensure de-militarization of the region along with getting it rid of mining or illegal activities. It also claims that there should not be any nuclear test or explosion in the region. The Hindu Analysis

The bill is in pursuant to India's accession to Antarctic Treaty, the Protocol on Environment Protection (Madrid Protocol) to the Antarctic Treaty and to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

The Bill provides a harmonious policy and regulatory framework for India's Antarctic activities through well-established legal mechanisms and will help in efficient and elective operations of the Indian Antarctic Programme. It will also facilitate India's interest and pro-active involvement in the management of growing Antarctic tourism and sustainable development of fisheries resources in Antarctic waters. It will also help in increased international visibility, credibility of India in Polar governance leading to international collaboration and cooperation in scientific and logistics fields. The Hindu Analysis

The continuing and growing presence of Indian scientists in Antarctica in the research stations with concurrent commitment to Antarctic studies and protection of the fragile Antarctic ecosystem warrants adoption of domestic legislation on Antarctica consistent with its obligations as a member of the Antarctic Treaty System. The enforcement of such laws will confer Jurisdiction on the courts of India to deal with any dispute or crimes committed in parts of Antarctica. Legislation of such a kind will bind the citizens to the policies of the Antarctic treaty system. This will also be useful in building credibility and enhancing the status of the Country globally.

The Bill also proposed to set-up the Indian Antarctic Authority (IAA) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, which shall be the apex decision making authority and shall facilitate programmes and activities permitted under the Bill. It shall provide a stable, transparent and accountable process for the sponsorship and supervision of Antarctic research and expeditions; ensure the protection and preservation of the Antarctic environment; and shall ensure compliance by Indian citizens engaged in the Antarctic programs and activities with relevant rules and internationally agreed standards. The Hindu Analysis

Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences will be the Chairperson of the IAA and the IAA will have official members from the concerned India Ministries and decisions will be by consensus.

India today has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri (Commissioned in 1989) and Bharati (Commissioned in 2012). India has successfully launched 40 annual scientific expeditions to Antarctica till date. With Himadri station in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, Arctic, India now belongs to the elite group of nations that have multiple research stations within the Polar Regions.

The Antarctic Treaty was signed at Washington D.C. on the 1st December, 1959 and was initially signed by 12 countries. Since then, 42 other countries have acceded to the Treaty. A total of fifty-four State Parties to the Treaty, twenty-nine countries have the status of Consultative Party with a right to vote in the Antarctic Consultative Meetings and twenty-five countries are Non-Consultative Parties having no right to vote. India signed the Antarctic Treaty on the 19th August, 1983 and received the consultative status on the 12th September, 1983.

The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources was signed at Canberra on the 20th day of May, 1980, inter alia, for the protection and preservation of the Antarctic environment and, in particular, for the preservation and conservation of marine living resources in Antarctica. India ratified the Convention on 17th June, 1985 and is a member of the Commission for Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources under that Convention. The Hindu Analysis

The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty was signed at Madrid on 4th October, 1991, inter alia, to strengthen the Antarctic Treaty system and for the development of a comprehensive regime for the protection of the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems. India signed the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty on 14th January, 1998. Antarctica lies south of 60 ñ South Latitude, which is a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science and should not become the scene or object of any international discord.

Puneet Bhatia

WIND ENERGY

WIND ENERGY – Today Current Affairs

- TOPIC IN NEWS :- Centre to stop 'reverse auctions' (THE HINDU)

Other Important Points :-

- India has committed to installing 60,000 MW of wind power projects by 2022, but has met only two-thirds of the target.

WIND ENERGY : The Hindu Analysis

- Wind energy or wind power is mostly the use of wind turbines to generate electricity.
- It is one of the fastest-growing renewable energies and its usage also rises worldwide.
- If we look at the time frame of 2009-2013, the production of wind electricity doubled, and in 2016 wind energy accounted for 16% of the electricity generated by renewables.
- For the production of electricity by wind energy, there is transformation of kinetic energy created by air in motion into electrical energy using wind turbines or wind energy conversion systems. The Hindu Analysis
- The amount of power generated from wind depends on the size of the turbine and the length of its blades.
- Many parts of the world have strong wind speeds, but the best locations for generating wind energy are sometimes remote ones or where there are less population sites.
- Offshore wind power also offers tremendous potential.

Advantages of Wind Energy : The Hindu Analysis

- Cost-effective. Land-based utility-scale wind is the lowest-priced energy source

available today. Wind is also freely and unlimitedly available. Any country can harness this energy as per its requirement without any cost.

- Clean Source of Energy. Wind energy doesn't pollute the air like thermal power plants which emit particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxide etc. These harmful toxic gasses causing human health problems and economic damages. Wind turbines don't produce such atmospheric emissions, as a result it helps to protect the environment aslo. The Hindu Analysis

- Creates jobs. It will also create manys jobs in different areas like manufacturing, installation, maintenance, and supporting services of wind energy plants.

- Doesn't impact Farmland Activities :- Farmers can also get extra income by giving their lands for installation of wind turbines and it takes up little space at the ground level, so it doesn't disrupt their farm's production.

- Reduces Dependence of Fossil Fuels :- Energy generated from fossil fuels not only contributes to global warming, but we'll one day run out of it. But renewable energy is unlimited and we can utilise this energy free of cost. Promotion of these energy at a large level will help to reduce the dependence of fossil fuels.

CHALLENGES OF WIND ENERGY : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- Dangerous to Wildlife :- Birds, Bats have been killed by flying into spinning turbine blades. Nowadays research is ongoing to develop and improve solutions to reduce the impact of wind turbines on these species.

- Noisy :- Wind turbines can be quite noisy, that's why they're mostly found in those areas where most people don't live. Depending on the location of the turbine, such as offshore, noise isn't an issue. The Hindu Analysis

- High Initial Cost :- There is a high initial cost involved in this energy like massive structures are often hundreds of feet tall, large blades, installation cost, maintenance cost etc.

- Variation in wind speed :- Area where speed of the winds varies, for those locations wind energy is not suitable. Since wind can blow at various speeds, it's hard to predict the amount of energy it can collect at a given time.

STATUS OF WIND ENERGY IN INDIA : THE HINDU ANALYSIS

- India is committed to achieving 500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by the year 2030.

- As on 30th Nov-2021, India's installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity stands at 150.54 GW (solar: 48.55 GW, wind: 40.03 GW, Small hydro Power: 4.83, Bio-power: 10.62, Large Hydro: 46.51 GW) and nuclear energy based installed electricity

capacity stands at 6.78 GW.

- India has the 4th largest wind power capacity in the world.
- In India northern, western and southern regions have the most wind power capacity. The Hindu Analysis
- According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), 7600km of coastline can generate 127 GW of offshore wind energy. And states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, M.P, Karnataka, A.P, Maharashtra and T.N account for more than 95 percent of commercially exploitable resources.
- Government has set a goal of installing 5 GW of offshore wind by 2022 and 30 GW by 2030.

Government Initiatives : The Hindu Analysis

- National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy- 2018 :- The main objective is to provide a framework for promotion of large grid connected wind-solar PV hybrid systems for optimal and efficient utilization of wind and solar resources, transmission infrastructure and land.
- National Offshore Wind Energy Policy- 2015 :-The main objective to develop offshore wind energy in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) along the Indian coastline of 7600 km.

Major Wind Power Plants in India : The Hindu Analysis

- Muppandal Wind Farm :- Tamil Nadu
- Jaisalmer Wind Park :- Rajasthan
- Vankusawade Wind Park :- Maharashtra .
- Brahmanvel Wind Farm :- Maharashtra.

Anoop Singh

Assisting Sri Lanka

Assisting Sri Lanka

- (GS Paper-II, Polity,Constitution,Governance,Social Justice and International Relations)
- Source: The Hindu

Why in news?

- India, which hosted an all-party meeting on the Sri Lankan situation, made a commitment to help Sri Lanka, which is battling the destruction brought on by the economic crisis.

What are the causes of the crisis in Sri Lanka?

- Sri Lanka needed assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after the civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ended in 2009.

- The previous Sri Lankan governments have engaged in political corruption and economic mismanagement (fiscal and budgetary).

- The twin deficit issue of an unsustainable current account deficit and an unsustainable fiscal deficit is what led to the crisis.

- Following the Easter bombs and the epidemic, tourism completely dropped.

- Once more as a result of the epidemic, migrant workers' remittances decreased.

- Due to the conflict in Ukraine and the increase in oil prices, import costs increased.

- On the internal front, however, the Rajapaksa administration is solely to blame for the fiscal disaster. It was in charge of three things in particular:

- Unaffordable populism through tax cuts, erratic economic management, such as a sudden switch to organic farming, and a failure to approach the IMF early enough.

- The conflict was sparked by the significant tax holiday that Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced soon after becoming power.

Could the major nations have intervened to attempt to help sooner?

- No nation could have prevented Sri Lanka's catastrophe by itself since it was so severe.

- A nation would have taken on additional burdens without truly resolving the crisis if it had intervened unilaterally to address the issue.

- The only thing that nations can do bilaterally is offer a bridge loan, which is what India has done. However, the IMF must provide a structured solution.

- Therefore, in a crisis like this, the IMF is needed, as well as the backing of other nations for the IMF programme.

What assistance did India offer?

- At the end of 2021, Sri Lanka requested a rescheduling of the debt repayment with India.

- India recently provided Sri Lanka with aid of roughly $3.8 billion. India was unable to restructure all of Sri Lanka's debt or provide all of the funding Sri Lanka requested.

- India provided timely and ample aid, giving Sri Lanka the breathing room it needed to approach the IMF and come to an agreement.

- Other nations have only offered the tiniest amounts of humanitarian aid; India's generosity has been unmatched.

- The issue facing Sri Lanka cannot be resolved by the Indian Government alone. The IMF, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and all other creditors must band together to release some financial pressure off Sri Lanka.

The actions China took

- The debt issue in Sri Lanka has two grievous faults related to China's involvement.

- excessive reliance on China as a bilateral partner and foreign-currency sovereign borrowing.

- Due to the fact that many of these loans were used to fund infrastructure projects that took too long to complete or were underutilised, debt has accumulated without any income to cover it.

- To that extent, China is accountable for accruing debt, making reckless loans, and, most recently, for delaying help to Sri Lanka.

Are there any other resources that India should help Sri Lanka use instead of the IMF?

- Because of the worry that IMF conditionality is too strict and does not lead to long-term structural adjustment, nations all over the world have been looking for alternatives to the IMF.

- But neither bilateral agreements nor regional ones have shown to be a sufficient replacement for the IMF.

- The fact is that when a country is enrolled in an IMF programme, foreign creditors and investors feel more secure in returning to the nation.

- And because of this, Sri Lanka ought to have contacted the IMF earlier to prevent a decline in confidence.

How closely does Sri Lanka's position resemble that of Indian States?

- Some Indian States are taking out loans and spending the money on giveaways that don't increase productivity, future economic activity, or manufacturing capability.

- However, they increase current usage. They therefore do not encourage long-term growth.

- However, Indian States and Sri Lanka cannot be compared because the former is a member
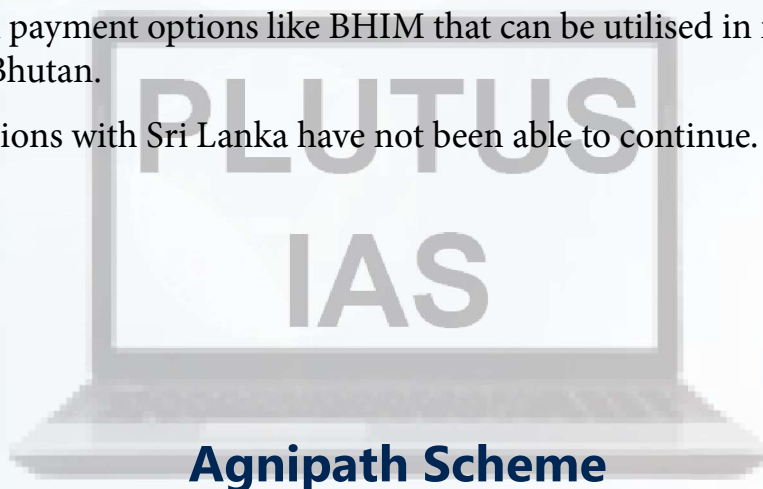
of a national economic body while the latter is an independent economic entity.

- India's states don't have their own balance of payments, and unlike Sri Lanka, they don't owe money in foreign currencies.

- States in India cannot issue money to pay off internal debt, although Sri Lanka may, as it did.

How can India prepare for problems in the rest of South Asia?

- Given that Nepal is connected to us in numerous ways, India should pay close attention to it.

- The fact that Nepal's currency is tied to ours and that its trade is entirely dependent on India is a consoling fact.

- Sri Lanka will be able to economise on hard currency if we implement the regionalization of the Indian rupee and make it easy for us to transact with them in rupees.

- India has digital payment options like BHIM that can be utilised in neighbouring nations like Nepal and Bhutan.

- Those conversations with Sri Lanka have not been able to continue.

Vivek Raj

Agnipath Scheme

- TOPIC IN NEWS :- Youth joining the defence forces under the Agnipath scheme will be valuable for the aviation industry, government told Parliament (THE HINDU)

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS :-

- According to government, "Agniveers are expected to be fit, disciplined and motivated professionals, after four years of military service. Those involved in aircraft maintenance, flight safety, air-cargo, supply chain, administrative, IT and drones, etc. will have valuable experience after serving that will be of significant relevance to the aviation industry.

- Minister for Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya Scindia also said that the Ministry was "sensitising" all stakeholders in the civil aviation sector to give "preference" to Agniveers in employment.

AGNIPATH SCHEME

- Agnipath scheme for recruiting soldiers across the Three services (Army, Navy and Airforce).

- Under this scheme, the youth joining the duty will be called Agniveer.

- Duration of services is four years, however after four years, only 25% of the batch will be recruited back into their respective services, for a period of 15 years.

- Under this scheme, around 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers will be recruited annually, and most will leave the service in four years.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- It is only for personnel below officer ranks (those who do not join the forces as commissioned officers).

- Aspirants between the ages of 17.5 years and 23 years will be eligible to apply.

BENEFITS FOR AGNIVEERS:

- After the completion of the 4-years of service, a one-time 'Seva Nidhi' package of Rs 11.71 lakhs will be paid to the Agniveers that will include their accrued interest thereon.

- They will also get a Rs 48 lakh life insurance cover for the four years.

- In case of death, the payout will be over Rs 1 crore, including pay for the unserved tenure.

- The government will help rehabilitate soldiers who leave the services after four years. They will be provided with skill certificates and bridge courses.

- For those wishing to be entrepreneurs, priority under bank loans will be provided.

- Different bridging courses of their choice certificate will be provided for further growth & development.

- The agniveers will be given priority in CAPFs, Assam Rifles,, and police and allied forces in several states.

ADVANTAGES OF THE AGNIPATH SCHEME

- Reduction of pension bill: The government has allocated or paid more than Rs. 3.3 lakh crore in defence pension since 2020. This scheme will reduce this heavy amount.

- Younger armed forces: Presently India armed force is around 13-lakh soldiers and the current average age profile is 32 years. It is envisaged it will come down by about 4-5 years by implementation of this scheme

- Better training and skilled force: A youthful armed forces will allow them to be easily

trained for new equipment, technologies etc.

- Enhance employment opportunities: Apart from job opportunities in the defence, youth will also get skills and experience during the four-year service as a result it will help them to get employment in various fields.

Anoop Singh

A plan to combat monkeypox

A PLAN TO COMBAT MONKEYPOX

(GS Paper-II, Polity,Constitution,Governance,Social Justice and International Relations)

Source: The Hindu

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Monkeypox was deemed a global public health emergency by the World Health Organization (PHEIC).

ABOUT MONKEYPOX:

A zoonosis is a disease that spreads from sick animals to humans, including squirrels, rats that were poached in Gambian, dormice, and several kinds of primates.

It is brought on by the monkeypox virus, a species of the Orthopoxvirus family.

The transmission and infection are thought to occur in African rodents and monkeys.

Transmission happens when contaminated things come into contact with bodily fluids, lesions on the skin or internal mucosal surfaces, or respiratory droplets.

Transmission from person to person is scarce.

Monkeypox was once considered one of the neglected tropical illnesses.

The monkeypox vaccines employed in the smallpox eradication operation also offered protection from that disease.

Typically, monkeypox is a self-limiting illness with symptoms that last between two and four weeks.

The case fatality rate has recently been between 3 and 6 percent.

PHEIC:

PHEIC is the highest degree of alert that the global health organisation can issue, and it is one

step away from being classified as a "pandemic."

Prior to monkeypox, only polio and SARS-CoV-2 were still being spread.

The WHO Director-General deemed monkeypox to be a PHEIC following a divided decision of the IHR Emergency Committee on the matter.

The decision's influencing factors

Information supplied by nations

Serious, abrupt, unusual, or unexpected bear ramifications for public health beyond the affected State's national boundary and may necessitate rapid international action are the three requirements for reporting a PHEIC under the International Health Regulations.

the Emergency Committee's recommendations

Uncertainty regarding scientific theories and data

There is a health risk.

Consequences

Several national leaders will now be alert for monkeypox and on the watch for it.

The choice to designate it as a PHEIC also creates opportunities for additional sources of funding.

The WHO may issue non-binding recommendations to nations, but if those nations deviate from them, they must provide a scientific justification.

What part did WHO play in keeping monkeypox under control?

Supporting nations conduct risk assessments and launch public health initiatives

developing and promoting testing capabilities

involving and safeguarding the impacted communities

stepping up public health and surveillance efforts

In hospitals and clinics, improving clinical management and infection prevention and control

accelerating study into the utilisation of medicines, vaccines, and other techniques

What approach needs to be taken to keep the disease under control?

The COVID-19 pandemic experience has demonstrated that governments take action to prevent "panic."

To appropriately summarise and distribute the nature of the threat, the government must start working in concert with the States.

In order to develop effective defences should the necessity arise, Indian labs and biotech

corporations must intensify their research and mine their armoury.

States that have recently imported instances of monkeypox in the human population must take action to stop the virus from spreading from person to person.

It is planned to consult behavioural scientists, elected officials, members of civil society, and representatives of affected communities on strategies to prevent stigmatising those who are afflicted.

It is necessary to step up surveillance for illnesses that are comparable to monkeypox and to report weekly updates to WHO.

For the screening, triage, isolation, testing, and clinical assessment of suspected cases of patients with monkeypox, it is necessary to follow the advised clinical care pathways and protocols.

Puneet Bhatia

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

TOPIC IN NEWS :- India adds five more Ramsar sites (THE HINDU)

Other Important Points

- New ramsar site :- 3 from Tamil Nadu, 1 each is in Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram.

- Now in India total there are 54 Ramsar sites, or wetlands of international importance.

- New ramsar sites are Karikili Bird Sanctuary, Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest and Pichavaram Mangrove in Tamil Nadu, the Sakhya Sagar in Madhya Pradesh and the Pala Wetlands in Mizoram.

- Total Ramsar wetlands in India are spread over 11,000 sq.km — around 10% of the total wetland area in the country — across 18 States.

- After designating a particular site as Ramsar site does not necessarily invite extra international funds, but the Centre & States government must ensure that these tracts of land are conserved and spared from encroachment.

- Acquiring this label also helps to boost the locale's tourism potential and its international visibility.

- National Wetland Inventory and Assessment compiled by the ISRO estimates India's wetlands to span around 1,52,600 square kilometers.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

- It is also known as the Convention on Wetlands. It is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of Ramsar sites (wetlands).

- It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the convention was signed in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

- World Wetlands Day :- 2nd February.

- Presently 171 countries are the parties of ramsar convention. India is also a party, signed it on 1st February 1982.

- Any wetland site which has been listed under the Ramsar Convention that aims to conserve it and promote sustainable use of its natural resources is called a Ramsar Site.

- The Ramsar Convention works closely with six other organisations known as international organization partners (IOPs). These are: BirdLife International, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International, WWF International, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). These organizations also support the work of the convention by providing expert technical advice, helping implement field studies, and providing financial support.

- The United Kingdom has the most number of Ramsar sites with 175. The country with the greatest area of listed wetlands is Bolivia, (148,000 square kilometers).

Ramsar site criteria

- A wetland can be considered internationally important if any of the following nine criteria apply:

  - It contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.

  - It supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

  - It supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

  - It supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

  - It regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

  - It regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird."

  - It supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families,

life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity."

- It is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend."

- It regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species."

- Source :- Ramsar.org

Ramsar Site in India

- Sundarbans is the largest Ramsar Site of India

- Chilika Lake (Orissa) and Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan) were recognized as the first Ramsar Sites of India

- Uttar Pradesh has the most number of Ramsar Sites in India. It has 10 Wetlands.

- Renuka Wetland (Area – 20 ha) in Himachal Pradesh is the smallest wetland of India..

Anoop Singh

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation, aka "alliance of the East". It was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

- These countries, except for Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1990s; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed it to SCO.

- It is seen as a counter balance to NATO.

- India and Pakistan became full members in Astana Summit 2017.

- Its headquarters is located in Beijing, China.

- The SCO has established relations with the UN, where it is an observer in the UNGA, EU, ASEAN, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and OIC.

Membership Criteria:

The system of consensus work in SCO for deciding on the admission of new members.

Current Membership:

- China
- India
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Uzbekistan

Changes in SCO:

- Iran and Belarus are set to be the two newest members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).
- Varanasi has been chosen as the SCO region's first "Tourism and Cultural Capital," and India will host the summit in 2023.

The theoretical framework for regional organisation:

- In the light of Spykman's Rimland Theory– the coastal areas or littorals of Eurasia are vital in controlling the World and not the Heartland – the rimland nations like Pakistan and Iran, therefore, play a major role in restricting India's growing hegemony in the region.
- Mackinder's Theory of Heartland, stated that the nation in control of the Heartland had the potential to "command the world", but at the same time, it also highlighted the great natural barriers which surrounds the Heartland. India faces a challenge in getting access to the Eurasian heartland because of prevailing geopolitical tensions in the concerned region.

Analysis of India's Ambitions in SCO – Kabir Taneja:

- While counter-terrorism seems to be highly prioritised within the SCO's agenda, it seems that it is ideologically and geo-politically too fractured to have any collective mechanisms on issues such as terrorism.
- For example, Beijing for long opposed India's attempts to put a ban on the Mumbai attacks mastermind Masood Azhar of UN-designated terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- New Delhi hopes to use the SCO as another multilateral platform to put pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting its asymmetric war but he believes that the platform

would not be able to achieve any of that.

The SCO began in 2001 as a forum for addressing border disputes in Central Asia and has been expanding ever since to include more countries and cover other issues like trade.

- Modi made it clear that New Delhi is supportive of connectivity projects, but only those that respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.
- On the spirit of Wuhan, the two sides reached a pact to share the hydrological data in 2018 with New Delhi agreed for the opening of a Bank of China branch in Mumbai and China agreed to provide market access to Indian pharmaceutical companies.

Its importance has increased at a time when the West remains divided and the US under Donald Trump is charting a unilateral course. He asserts that India should use this opportunity to assert it leadership by defending the ideal of rule based international world order.

Thus, it appears that in SCO, India would have to counter the double gang of China and Pakistan. Provided the clear creation of block arrangement in form of QUAD and Russia-China-Pakistan axis, the SCO is going to be further subdivided.

Vikas Gupta

INDIGENOUS AIRCRAFT CARRIER (IAC) 'VIKRANT'

DELIVERY OF INDIGENOUS AIRCRAFT CARRIER (IAC) 'VIKRANT'

Indian Navy has created maritime history today by taking delivery of the prestigious Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) 'Vikrant from her builder Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), Kochi. Designed by Indian Navy's inhouse Directorate of Naval Design (DND) and built by CSL, a Public Sector Shipyard under Ministry of Shipping (MoS), the carrier is christened after her illustrious predecessor, India's first Aircraft Carrier which played a vital role in the 1971 war.

Coinciding with the celebrations to commemorate 75th anniversary of India's independence 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the reincarnation of Vikrant is a true testimony to the country's zeal and fervor in pursuing capability build up towards enhanced maritime security.

The 262 mtr long carrier has a full displacement of close to 45,000 tones which is much larger and advanced than her predecessor. The ship is powered by four Gas Turbines totaling 88 MW power and has a maximum speed of 28 Knots. Built at an overall cost of close to Rs. 20,000 Crs, the project has been progressed in three Phases of contract between MoD and CSL, concluded in May 2007, Dec 2014 and Oct 2019 respectively.

The ship's keel was laid in Feb 2009, followed by launching in Aug 2013. With an overall indigenous content of 76%, IAC is a perfect example of the nation's quest for "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat" and provides thrust to Government's 'Make in India' initiative. With the delivery of Vikrant, India has joined a select group of nations having the niche capability to indigenously design and build an Aircraft Carrier.

Vikrant has been built with a high degree of automation for machinery operation, ship navigation and survivability, and has been designed to accommodate an assortment of fixed wing and rotary aircraft.

The ship would be capable of operating an air wing consisting of 30 aircraft comprising of MIG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31, MH-60R multi-role helicopters, in addition to indigenously manufactured Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) (Navy). Using a novel aircraft-operation mode known as STOBAR (Short Take- Off but Arrested Landing), the IAC is equipped with a ski- jump for launching aircraft, and a set of 'arrester wires' for their recovery onboard.

The ship has a large number of indigenous equipment and machinery, involving major industrial houses in the country viz. BEL, BHEL, GRSE, Keltron, Kirloskar, Larsen & Toubro, Wartsila India etc. as well as over 100 MSMEs. The indigenisation efforts has also led to development of ancillary industries, besides generation of employment opportunities and bolstering plough back effect on economy, both locally as well as pan-India.

A major spin-off of this is the development and production of indigenous warship grade steel for the ship through a partnership between Navy, DRDO and Steel Authority of India (SAIL), which has enabled the country to become self-sufficient with respect to worship steel. Today all the warships being built in the country are being manufactured using indigenous steel.

Several design iterations, including use of 3D Virtual Reality models and advanced engineering software were used by the Directorate of Naval Design in shaping the design of the carrier. CSL had also upgraded their shipbuilding infrastructure as well as enhanced productivity

skills during the building of the ship.

Delivery of Vikrant was marked by signing of acceptance documents on behalf of Indian Navy by the Commanding Officer Designate of Vikrant, representatives of Naval Headquarters and Warship Overseeing Team (Kochi) and by the Chairman and Managing Director on behalf of Cochin Shipyard Ltd., in the presence of Senior officers of Indian Navy and Cochin Shipyard.

Vikrant has been delivered to the Indian Navy by CSL following extensive user acceptance trials conducted between Aug 2021 and Jul 2022, during which ship's performance, including hull, main propulsion, PGD, auxiliary equipment, aviation facilities, weapon & sensors as well as sea keeping & maneuvering capabilities were proved satisfactory in accordance with trial protocols and system parameters.

The delivery of Vikrant today is the culmination of a long design, build and trials phase, during which both the Indian Navy and CSL had to overcome multitude of unprecedented technical and logistic challenges including COVID-19 pandemic and changed geo-political scenario. The successful delivery of the indigenous carrier, a major milestone activity and historical event, is testimony to the dedicated efforts of a large number of stakeholders within the Indian Navy, shipyard, industry, OEMs & MSMEs for over two decades.

The Indigenous Aircraft Carrier would soon be commissioned into the Indian Navy as Indian Naval Ship (INS) Vikrant which would bolster India's position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its quest for a blue water Navy..

Puneet Bhatia

11th Agriculture Census in the country

11TH AGRICULTURE CENSUS IN THE COUNTRY

Ministry: Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare launches the 11th Agriculture Census in the country

Objective: Prime Minister's focus is on increasing farmers income and empowering them by organizing small farmers

New Feature: For the first time, data collection for agricultural computations will be done on smartphones and tablets

AGRICULTURE CENSUS OVERVIEW:

Recognizing the importance of the agriculture sector in the economy, the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare has been implementing the Agriculture Census Scheme since 1970-71.

Agriculture Census in India has been Conducting following broad guidelines of decennial World Census of Agriculture (WCA) evolved by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations conducted at an interval of five years. In the Agriculture Census, operational holding has been taken as a statistical unit at micro-level for data collection as operational holding is the ultimate unit for taking agriculture-related decisions.

Periodic Agriculture Censuses are the main source of information on basic characteristics of operational holdings such as land-use, cropping pattern, irrigation status, tenancy and dispersal of holdings etc. This information is tabulated by different size classes and social groups and serves as an input for development planning, socio-economic policy formulation and establishment of national priorities. The Census also provides the basis for development of a comprehensive integrated national system of agricultural statistics.

SO FAR, TEN AGRICULTURE CENSUSES SINCE 1970-71 HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED IN THE COUNTRY. THE LAST AGRICULTURE CENSUS WAS HELD IN 2015-16.

The Agriculture Census Scheme was converted from a Centrally-Sponsored Scheme to a Central Sector Plan Scheme in 2007-08. Accordingly, 100 percent financial assistance is provided to States/ UTs for payment of salaries, office expenses, honoraria, tabulation and printing of schedules, etc.

The Eleventh Agricultural Census (2021-22) was launched in the country by the Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar.

This computation will bring huge benefits in a vast and agricultural country like India. Shri Tomar said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi emphasis is being given on increasing farmers income. Besides, there is a need to change their standard of living, organize small farmers in order to empower them, attract them towards remunerative crops and ensure the quality of the produce at par with global standards.

During the programme, Shri Tomar conveyed his greetings for the Agriculture Census and said that the Agriculture sector is reaping the fruits of concrete steps taken by Prime Minister Modi, the country is rapidly moving towards digital agriculture. This is the time to make full use of technology in this computation. He said that the Agriculture Census should be thought of in a broader perspective. Agricultural computations can also contribute to the mapping of crops, so that the country gets its benefits. Shri Tomar asked the Central Departments, State Governments and concerned institutions to carry out this census with full dedication.

On the occasion, Shri Tomar released the Handbook on Operational Guidelines for Census for the use of States/UTs, and launched the Data Collection Portal/App.

Agriculture Census is conducted every 5 years, which is being undertaken now after delay due to the corona pandemic.

The field work of the agricultural census will start in August 2022.

The Purpose: Agricultural Census is the main source of information on a variety of agricultural parameters at a relatively minute level, such as the number and area of operational holdings, their size, class-wise distribution, land use, tenancy and cropping pattern, etc. This is the first time that data collection for agricultural census will be conducted on smartphones and tablets, so that data is available in time.

Most of the States have digitized their land records and surveys, which will further accelerate the collection of agricultural census data. The use of digitized land records and the use of mobile apps for data collection will enable the creation of a database of operational holdings in the country.

During the technical session, the salient features of the Agriculture Census Implementation Procedure and web portal and mobile app were demonstrated. The new initiatives highlighted in the presentation include use of digital land records like land title records and survey reports, collection of data through app/software using smart phone/tablet, complete enumeration of all villages in states with non-land records during Phase-I as done in states having land records, and real time monitoring of progress and processing.

Puneet Bhatia

Minority in India – issue and solutions

Article 29 and 30 of the constitution guarantees protection to the social and educational rights of minorities like their culture, script and language. But the constitution has not defined or identified any of the linguistic and religious minorities, per se.

SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT:

- S.C. in N. Ammad vs The Manager, Emjay High School, had held that minority status is a matter of fact and does not require state recognition.
- S.C. in TMA Pai foundation vs state of Karnataka held that sates are the unit for the determining the status of minority, not the whole of India.
- Later on, parliament passed the National Commission for Minorities Act, which enables the central Government to identify minority at national level through a notification under the act.

RECOGNITION BY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA:

Accordingly, Government of India has notified Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians as minorities. Also, as per the Judgement of SC, Hindus are to be considered as minorities in seven states. However, none of the 7 states have notified Hindus as minority.

BAL PATIL CASE 2003:

SC while refusing recognition of the Jains as a religious minority, said that the ideal of right of equality in a democratic society means the elimination of majority and minority and so-called forward and backward classes.

- However, prof. Faizal Mustafa (Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University) has argued that it is one of the most backward judgement itself, as it doesn't give due recognition to the Multicultural space of the society. He further adds that Religion is still the alpha and omega of Indian life.
- He argues that the Article 25 (freedom of conscience), Right to privacy, right to dignified life etc essentially gives freedom to establish a new religion or come out of a particular religion [in context of Lingayatas demand]. He further supports his argument by supreme court judgement in R P Gandhi v. State of Bombay (1954), in which Supreme Court had admitted that "every person has fundamental right to entertain such religious beliefs as may be approved by his conscience."

- Assertion by Pratap Bhanu Mehta:

While identities matter as source of confidence, sense of security, but when they are carelessly ascribed, they become inimical to freedom, as visible by communalism, riots and violence.

PRESENT STATUS:

So basically, everyone in India has the potential to be recognised as a minority in one State or another because as per the Supreme Court religious and linguistic minorities are "State-dependent."

- In Ladakh, Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Kashmir, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Manipur, adherents of Judaism, Baha'i, and Hinduism are unable to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice due to a lack of "minority" status at the state level, endangering their fundamental rights protected by Articles 29 and 30.

HAJ SUBSIDY ISSUE:

The policy to support Muslims in making the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia was done by British through Port Haj Committees Act 1932.

- In the ensuing decades, the Act has undergone numerous changes and now the Haj subsidy refers to discounted airfares given by the government-owned airlines, Air India.
- In 2012, a Supreme Court order directed the Haj subsidy to be gradually phased out.
- In 2017, a Central Haj Committee meeting decided to do away with the subsidy by the following year.
- Finally, the government has abolished the subsidy being given to Haj pilgrims every year. The government said it will use the subsidy funds to empower the minorities.

CRITICISMS:

- Monopoly of Air India, benefiting the airlines far more than the pilgrims.
- Some of the political parties have also called the subsidy as minority appeasement.
- A secular state must not fund religious endeavors.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGES THAT ARE OFFERED GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY IN INDIA?

The Haj is not the only religious pilgrimage being funded by the State. For instance, the state

and central governments spend considerable amounts on the pilgrim facilities at the four Kumbh melas. The Kailash Manasarovar yatra from North India to the mountains of Tibet is yet another pilgrimage which is organised by the government.

Thus, it is evident in India recognition of the rights of minority is very disputed topic. It has various upsides and downsides. As emphasized by Sachar Committee, on the one hand minority assistance by state is called as "appeasement"; on the other the minority is tagged as anti-national. However, keeping Gandhi at the core, we should try to achieve and balance and work towards, the upliftment of all (Sarvodaya).

Vikas Gupta

More Opportunities for youth to become part of voters list

MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO BECOME PART OF VOTERS LIST

Top News: 17+ year old youngsters can now apply in advance for having their names enrolled in Voters list and not necessarily have to await the pre-requisite criterion of attaining age of 18 years on 1st January of a year.

The Election Commission of India (ECI): is a constitutional body. It was established by the constitution of India to conduct and regulate elections in the country. Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of the president of India, and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the election commission. Thus, the Election Commission is an all-India body in the sense that it is common to both the Central government and the state governments.

Structure of the Commission: The commission was established in 1950 and originally only had one Chief Election Commissioner. Two additional Commissioners were appointed to the commission for the first time on 16 October 1989 (on the eve of the 1989 General Election), but they had a very short tenure, ending on 1 January 1990. "The Election Commissioner Amendment Act, 1989" was adopted on 1 January 1990 which turned the commission into a multi-member body: a 3-member Commission has been in operation since then and the decisions by the commission are made by a majority vote

Recent Change in Voter List: ECI led by Chief Election Commissioner Shri Rajiv Kumar and

Election Commissioner Shri Anup Chandra Pandey have directed the CEOs/EROs/AEROs of all States to work out tech-enabled solutions such that the youth are facilitated to file their advance applications with reference to three subsequent qualifying dates i.e. 01st April, 01st July and 01st October and not just 1stJanuary. Henceforth, the Electoral Roll will be updated every quarter and eligible youngsters can be registered in the next quarter of the year in which he/she has attained the qualifying age of 18 years.

After getting registered, he/she will be issued an Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC). For the current round of annual revision of electoral roll, 2023, any citizen attaining the age of 18 years by April 1, July 1 and October 1 of 2023 can also submit an advance application for registration as a voter from the date of draft publication of electoral roll.

The Election Commission of India, in pursuance of the legal amendments in the Section 14(b) of the RP Act 1950 and consequent modifications in Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, has initiated the process for bringing about necessary changes for preparation/revision of electoral roll of Assembly/Parliamentary Constituency. It may be recalled that on the recommendations of ECI, the Ministry of Law & Justice recently amended the RP Act to provide for four qualifying dates i.e., 01st January, 01st April, 01st July and 01st October as eligibility for youngsters to register in electoral rolls as opposed to the earlier single qualifying date of 1st January only.

As per existing policy, revision of electoral rolls with reference to 1st January of the coming year as the qualifying date was done normally in the later part of each year in all States/ UTs (normally in the last quarter of a year) so that final publication of the electoral rolls is made in the first week of January of the succeeding year. This meant that a large number of young persons who completed 18 years after 1st January had to wait for Special Summary Revision of the next year for enrolment and were not able to participate in elections held in the intervening period.

The Commission has also made the registration Forms more user friendly and simpler. The newly modified Forms will come into force on 1st August, 2022. All applications (claims and objections), in old forms, received before 1st August, 2022 will be processed and disposed of and in such cases, there is no need to file application in new forms.

The Commission has ordered Annual Summary Revision with reference to 01.01.2023 as the qualifying date in all States except the Poll Going States. All the pre-revision activities are undertaken in accordance with the Commission's existing instructions and guidelines and Manual on Electoral Roll, 2016 and Manual on Polling Stations, 2020. The revision and pre-revision activities are done in such a manner that the Electoral Rolls are finally published

much before National Voters' Day (25th January of every year) so that EPICs generated for new electors especially young voters (18-19 years) can be distributed to them in ceremonial manner on the day of NVD.

Pre-revision activities include Rationalization/Re-arrangement of Polling Stations; Removal of discrepancies of demographically/Photo Similar Entries; Preparation of Supplements and integrated draft roll with reference to 01.10.2022 as the qualifying date. Commission has directed all efforts to ensure 100% removal of DSEs/PSEs from electoral roll and discrepancies in EPICs during the current round of pre-revision activities.

The revision activities to begin in November include disposal of claims and objections received after publication of integrated draft electoral roll. Under the Special Summary Revision, a one-month period is available to file claims and objections in the draft electoral roll. Special camps will be organized by CEOs on weekends for which the date will be publicized by concerned CEOs. The final electoral roll will be published on 5th January 2023.

Polling Station Rationalization

As part of the Annual Summary Revision, polling stations, having more than 1500 electors, shall be rationalized/modified as per the given schedule and before the draft publication of electoral rolls in accordance with instructions contained in Manual on Polling Station, 2020. A new Polling Station shall be created only after rationalizing the sections to the adjacent Polling Stations to the possible extent. Other objectives of rationalization of polling stations are to group all the family members and neighbors in a section.

EPIC-AADHAR linking

For linking of AADHAR number with Electoral Roll data, provision has been made in the modified registration forms to seek Aadhaar details of electors. A new Form-6B has also been introduced for collecting Aadhaar number of existing electors. However, no application for inclusion of name in electoral roll shall be denied and no entries in electoral roll shall be deleted for inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar Number.

It has been emphasized that while handling Aadhaar number of the applicants, the provision under Section 37 of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 must be adhered to. Under no circumstances should it go public. If the electors' information is required to put for public display, the Aadhaar details must be

removed or masked.

A Time bound drive is being started w.e.f. 01.8.22 for collection of Aadhaar number of the existing electors. Furnishing of Aadhaar number is purely voluntary. Objective of the programme is to establish the identity of electors and authentication of entries in Electoral Roll

Deleting Repeat/Multiple Entries from Electoral Roll

Detailed Procedure of Deletion of Repeat/Multiple Entries has been specified. In repeated/ multiple entries reported by individual citizens, BLAs of political parties or RWA representatives, field verification is mandatorily done in each and every case. Name of the elector would be deleted in the electoral roll only at the place where he/she is not found to be ordinarily residing.

Field Verifications and Super checking for Healthy Electoral Roll

For the purpose of improving the health of the electoral roll, the Election Commission has emphasized the need for field verification by the Booth Level Officers. There is a mechanism for supervision and checking for enforcing strict accountability of the work performed by different levels of electoral machinery, such as Supervisors, EROs and AEROs by field verification. Similarly, DEOs, Roll Observers and CEOs also check the work done by EROs before the final decision on claims and objections is taken. Besides, Officers from ECI and O/o CEOs are also deployed to further random checks and to supervise.

Participative Process- Involving BLAs

With a view to ensure more involvement of political parties, the Commission has allowed Booth Level Agents (BLAs) of recognized political parties to file applications in bulk, subject to the condition that a BLA shall not submit more than 10 Forms to BLO at one time/in one day. If a BLA files more than 30 Applications/Forms during the entire period of filing claims and objections, then the cross verification must be done by ERO/AERO themselves. Further, the BLA will also submit a list of application forms with a declaration that he has personally verified the particulars of the application forms and is satisfied that they are correct.

Puneet Bhatia

FCRA – A tool of Governance or Suppression

What is FCRA?

- Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 repeals and replaces Foreign Contribution (regulation) Act, 1976. It regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution by certain individuals or associations.
- For any suspicion of violation of the act viz., acts detrimental to the national interest, MHA can use any agency, including IB, for getting info over the association.

The following persons are prohibited from accepting foreign contribution:

- Candidate for election.
- Registered newspaper and any association involved in transmission of any news related item.
- Judge, government servant or employee of any entity controlled or owned by the government.
- Member of any Legislature.
- Political party or its office bearers.
- Organisations of a political nature as may be specified.

However, foreign contribution can be accepted by the above-mentioned persons in the following specific situation:

- By way of remuneration or payment for services rendered.
- As agent of a foreign source in relation to any transaction made by such foreign source with the Central or State Government.
- By way of gift or presentation as a member of any Indian delegation.
- From his relative.
- By way of any scholarship, stipend or any payment of like nature.

Why FCRA?

- It was brought by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency with ostensible aim to curb foreign interference in domestic politics (due to cold war). Actually the aim was to clamp down on political dissent.
- With the 1991 reforms, the Indian state had no problem accepting contributions from foreign donors such as the World Bank or IMF.

Differences:

- Under FCRA 1976, FCRA registration was permanent but under 2010 law, it is for 5 years only. This gave a state an invisible whip to bring errant 'organisations' to heel.
- Only 50% of the foreign funds could be used for administrative expenses. Thus controlling their administrative capacities.
- FCRA 1976 primarily aimed at political parties but FCRA 2010 restate it as "organisations of a political nature". Viz., now it includes any organisation which engages itself in common methods of political action like 'bandh' or 'hartal', or 'jail bharo' etc in support of public causes.
- Individuals are permitted to accept foreign contributions without permission of MHA. However, the monetary limit for acceptance of such foreign contributions shall be less than Rs. 25,000.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment, 2020:

- Restrictions on the transfer of foreign contribution money to other organizations.
  - It will severely limit interorganizational cooperation, and smaller, locally active NGOs risk running out of money.
  - This would also impair the flow of international finance and help for development.
- Restricts administrative expenses to 20% of an NGO's budget.
  - It will impact the salaries of employees and the ability of NGOs to draw various experts.
- Every organization must have its FCRA account in only one SBI branch in Delhi.
  - In an age of internet connectedness and computerised financial transactions, this may be a step backwards.
  - It will also affect the movement of funds in remote locations.
- Increased the power of government officers to investigate breaches.
  - Government interference may obstruct working in critical areas such as Tribal Welfare in LWE affected areas.
- Proposed National Council of Social Work (Education and Practice) Bill, which regulates social work education.
  - This council is intended to encourage social work professionals to act ethically, but it may make it much more difficult for those without degrees to get employment in the NGO sector.

Issue with FCRA:

- These changes are not in sync with the ideals of human rights, environmentalism, and civil liberties (important pillars of India's Soft Power) as these sectors receive

most of the foreign contributions.

- Oxfam's licence was not renewed because the Oxfam was publishing papers on the pandemic's effects on the poor and the hardship of migrant workers that were widely read.
- The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative's licence was revoked after its FCRA clearance was briefly suspended.
- Attacks against NGOs that have tirelessly fought for minority rights, like Amnesty International and the Centre for Equity Studies, were made using the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Noel Harper V/s Union of India:

Supreme court while upholding the FCRA 2020 has opined the following –

- It was decided that accepting foreign donations may be controlled by the Parliament and that they couldn't be an absolute right.
- Supreme court used the Drug vs. Alcohol Metaphor: As long as it is used discreetly and in moderation, Foreign Contributions acts as a medication. However, a free and unrestrained influx of foreign aid has the potential to be a depressant that threatens the sovereignty and integrity of the state.

Thus, it is evident that the amendment to FCRA and the original FCRA, though in principle may not be very bad. But in real life may become a case of chilling effect on free speech. It is necessary that the government must alley such fear and stop the alleged misuse of FCRA..

Vikas Gupta