

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

GENERAL STUDIES-1

HISTORY

PAIKA REBELLION

Why in news?

Bicentenary celebrations of the rebellion was inaugurated by the President of India.

About the rebellion

Two-hundred years ago in 1817, a valiant uprising of soldiers led by Buxi Jagabandhu (Bidyadhar Mohapatra) took place in Khurda of Odisha. This is known as Paika rebellion.

Why was there a rebellion?

The Paikas were the traditional land-owning militia of Odisha and served as warriors. When armies of the East India Company overran most of Odisha in 1803, the Raja of Khurda lost his primacy and the power and prestige of the Paikas declined. The British were not comfortable with these aggressive, warlike new subjects.

- The British gave a go ahead to the policy of taking over the hereditary rent-free lands granted to the Paikas.
- The Paikas revolted against the British. Other underlying causes included the rise in the price of salt, abolition of the cowrie currency for payment of taxes and an overtly extortionist land revenue policy.
- The Paika managed to capture two bases- Puri and Pipli.

Although initially the Company struggled to respond they managed to put down the rebellion by May 1817. Many of the Paik leaders were hung or deported. Jagabandhu surrendered in 1825.

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SOCIAL ISSUES AND INDIAN SOCIETY

'I STAND BY MY COUNTRY' CAMPAIGN

'I stand by my country' is a theme around which the government hopes to create a citizen movement. It was a part of a twin celebration to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Quit India movement and the 70th Independence Day.

Details

It is a multimedia campaign that will focus on inspiring the young generation and instilling in them a sense of pride and responsibility.

- The idea stresses that in the next five years, a 'New India' will be built which is "rid of corruption and black money".

The aim of the campaign is to portray an India which is "bold and decisive, can secure its future, is on the path of reforms".

LAW ON SOCIAL BOYCOTT IN MAHARASHTRA

The Maharashtra Prohibition of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2016 paves way for disallowing social boycott in the name of caste, community, religion, rituals or customs. The targets are the practices of informal caste panchayats or dominant sections using ostracism as a means of enforcing social conformity.

Important provisions

The Act lists different actions that may amount to 'social boycott', which has been made a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment up to three years or a fine of ₹ 1 lakh or both.

- Preventing the performance of a social or religious custom
- Denial of the right to perform funerals or marriages

Social boycott

It defines social boycott as any intra-community act that creates impediments in the observance of social or religious customs, obstructs marriages or funerals by community rites, ostracizes socially or commercially, denies access to public services or places of worship, incites severing of ties, segregates children, discriminates on the basis of "morality, social acceptance, political inclination, sexuality," etc; forces or obstructs the wearing of a particular dress or use of language or similar acts, culminating in social boycott.

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- Cutting off someone's social or commercial ties
- Preventing access to educational or medical institutions or community halls and public facilities,
- Any form of social ostracism on any ground.

Its progressive sweep takes into account discrimination on the basis of morality, social acceptance, political inclination and sexuality.

- It even makes it an offence to create cultural obstacles by forcing people to wear a particular type of clothing or use a particular language.

The need of such a law

The decision was a reaction to pressures from growing incidents of atrocities in the name of tradition, caste and community on individuals by jati panchayats or gavkis wielding extra-judicial powers.

Some provisions amiss

- Identifying caste panchayats by the nature of their crimes rather than the kind of power they exercise is a challenge the act has receded from.
- The act has no provision for special protection or compensation and rehabilitation of victims.
- The act neither deals with the question of inter-caste/inter-community/inter-religious marriages clearly, nor takes a position on collective caste panchayats which are not intra-caste affairs.

It is needless to say that caste panchayats exist in all castes whether in the name of gaavkis and panchayats in the villages or in the more sophisticated and regularised forms of the mahasabhas, sanghas, mandals, guilds, or rakshak dals, of the upper castes in the cities. From the tenor of the new law it is clear that these are not under the scanner. This also reinforces the point that though respite from the horrors of social boycott is necessary, this does not guarantee respite from the ghost of caste/community based panchayats.

In conclusion

Nevertheless, this act is the first, and an important, step in pointing out the problems with parallel systems of justice dispensation that derive their authority from tradition, respect for "public" (mob) sentiment or the autonomy of community logic.

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Such special legislations are required to prohibit social discrimination, ostracism and practices repugnant to human dignity. The law may serve as a template for similar legislation in other States.

GENERAL STUDIES-2

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POLITY

THE 14TH PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Who is Ram Nath Kovind?

Former Bihar governor

Election of the president

Article 54 speaks about the guidelines about voters in a Presidential election.

The President shall be elected by the members of an electoral college consisting of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament; and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of the States."

Who isn't a part of the electoral college?

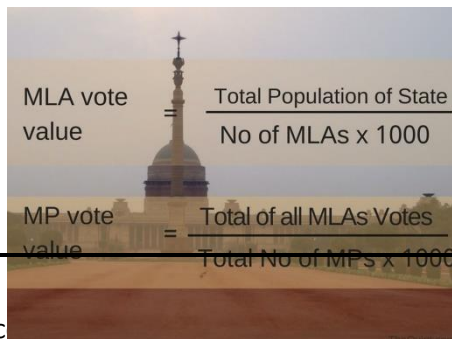
The nominated members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies, and members of Legislative Council.

Eligibility to run for Presidency

- A person who is 35 years of age.
- An Indian National.
- Must have a support of 50 MPs/MLAs (these can't be nominated members).
- Must deposit Rs 15,000 as a security amount with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Must not hold any Office of Profit. (Any Constitutional position, which may further give rise to a conflict of interests in discharging of duties).

Type of voting

Article 55 → *"The election of the President shall be held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single*



$$\begin{aligned} \text{MLA vote value} &= \frac{\text{Total Population of State}}{\text{No of MLAs} \times 1000} \\ \text{MP vote value} &= \frac{\text{Total of all MLAs Votes}}{\text{Total No of MPs} \times 1000} \end{aligned}$$

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transferable vote and the voting at such election shall be by secret ballot."

Unlike the conventional ballot voting, where the voter polls only for a single candidate of his choice, the lawmakers mark their preferences in the Presidential election. It is mandatory for every lawmaker to mark his first preference, otherwise the vote is deemed invalid. He or she, however, can leave other preferences vacant.

Unlike the general election counting, where an MP or an MLA is elected through 'first past the post' system, *the winner in Presidential election is declared on the basis of a quote which is obtained by dividing the total value of valid votes by 2, and adding 1 to*

Vote value: Vote of each MP and MLA carries a certain value. In the case of MLAs, the value is calculated by dividing total population of the state by the number of elected members to the Legislative Assembly, further divided by 1000. As of now, the value of each MLAs vote is fixed. The population data is taken from the 1971 Census. In the case of an MP, the vote value is decided by dividing the total value of votes of all MLAs of the whole country, divided by the total number of elected MPs in Lower House (Lok Sabha) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). At present, the vote value of each MP is fixed at 708.

quotient.

Secret Vote: Unlike the voting for any Bill or any motion in Parliament or state Assembly, secret voting is done to elect the President (Nobody can ever come to know who voted for whom).

Parties can't issue a whip to their members: Since the Presidential election is intended to be free and fair, and representatives are supposed to exercise their free will, political parties are not allowed to issue a whip to their members for voting.

15TH VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Who? Former Union Minister **M Venkaiah Naidu**

Election of the Vice President

The election for the Vice President is conducted through a secret ballot where the members of Electoral College consisting of Members of the both Houses of Parliament including, the nominated members of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha vote.

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- Members of Parliament will use special pens for marking their choice. Votes marked with any other pen are liable to be rejected.
- The ballot paper shall contain the names of the contesting candidates, but does not contain any election symbol.
- A candidate needs 20 electors as proposers and at least another 20 electors as seconders for his nomination. The candidate also has to make a security deposit of Rs. 15,000.
- A person shall not be eligible for election as Vice-President if he holds any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of any State or under any Local or other Authority subject to the control of any of said Governments.
- The Vice President is the 'ex-officio' Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha.
- The Vice President is elected for a period of five years. There is no fixed retirement age to the Vice President and he or she can be re-elected as the Vice President for any number of times.
- The Vice President is entitled to receiving the salary of the Chairman of the Council of States, which presently amounts to Rs 1,25,000 per month.

Eligibility

- He must be a citizen of India.
- He must have completed the age of 35 years.
- He is qualified for election as a member of the Council of States (Article 66).

Removal:

The Vice President tenure can be terminated before the completion of fixed five-year term, either by resignation or by removal by the President. There is no formal process of impeachment for the removal of the Vice President, and a removal proceeding can be initiated when members of the Rajya Sabha vote against the Vice President in an effective majority and members of Lok Sabha agree to this decision in a simple majority.

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A total of 14 days advance notice must be given prior to the initiation of the removal proceedings of the Vice President. In such cases, when a temporary vacancy in the office of the Vice President is created, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha takes over the role of the Chairman of

Simple Majority: This refers to majority of more than 50% of the members present and voting. For example if 200 members are present and voting then simple majority will be considered as 101, as it is more than 50% of members presenting and voting. It does not matter what is the total membership or how many are absent in the house, what matters is present and voting. Most of the normal motions in the house such as No-confidence Motion, Vote of thanks (to the President or Governor), Adjournment Motion, Censure Motion, Cut motions etc. need simple majority.

Absolute Majority: It refers to a majority of more than 50% of the total membership of the house. For example if the total strength of Rajyasabha or Upper house is 250 then the absolute majority will be considered as 126 irrespective of voting number. It is not used anywhere in constitution as standalone requirement.

Effective Majority: Effective Majority of house means more than 50% of the effective strength of the house. This implies that out of the total strength, we deduct the absent and vacant seats. Our Constitution writes "all the then members" which refers to effective majority.

Special Majorities: This is a special kind of majority required in certain cases. The majority votes of 2/3rd members present and voting and also these votes should exceed 50% of the total strength of house. Now lets assume a scenario: The strength of the house is 250 and lets assume 230 are present. Now the absolute majority will be considered if the positive votes will exceed both condition – 2/3rd of present and voting that is 154 and more than 50% of total strength of the house that is 126. So in this condition 154 votes will be required.

the Rajya Sabha.

ELECTORAL BONDS GIVEN A GO-AHEAD

Despite having differences politically, the government is going ahead with electoral bond.

Significance of these bonds

They hold a promise to promote transparency in political funding. The Budget 2017 had proposed capping of anonymous cash donations to political parties at Rs 2,000 and introduced the concept of electoral bonds.

What are electoral bonds?

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How An Electoral Bond Works

- 01 Notified banks are chosen
- 02 The notified bank issues electoral bonds
- 03 The donor buys an electoral bond using a cheque/digital payment
- 04 The donor gives the party of his/her choice the bond within the specified timeframe
- 05 The party deposits the bond in an account, the details of which are with the Electoral Commission

The bonds will not carry the name of the donor and routing of the money through banks will ensure that only tax paid money comes into the political system.

How are electoral bonds better?

- ✓ Donations through cheques becomes transparent and leads to political vendetta by rivals.
- ✓ Donors did not want their names to be known was that, following the donation, if they legitimately win a contract, then they open themselves up to suspicion of benefiting from a quid pro quo arrangement with the party in power.

DEBATE AROUND ARTICLE 35A

Why in news?

The Central govt. sought a “larger debate” over **Article 35A of the Constitution**, which is related to the Jammu and Kashmir. The move has triggered a political storm with several parties warning against any tinkering of the provision.

Article 35A

The article empowers the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to define permanent residents of the state *and provide special rights and privileges to them*. It was added through the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954, issued under Article 370.

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Issue at hand now

Attempts to undo Article 35A of the Indian Constitution would strike a fatal blow to the nationalists in the state. There is an ongoing case in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the Article, which prevents non-J&K state subjects from settling and buying property in the state. However, Kashmiris are apprehensive that such a move would lead a large scale demographic transformation of the Valley.

ALL-INDIA JUDICIAL SERVICE OPPOSED

Why in news?

Nine High Courts have opposed a proposal to have **an all-India service** for the lower judiciary, despite Supreme Court giving its nod.

Backgrounder:

AIJS is a long-pending proposal to set up the new service to have a separate cadre for the lower judiciary in the country. The idea was first mooted in the 1960s.

The Govt's new push came in the form of a NEET-like examination, to recruit judges to the lower judiciary which is bogged down with 4,452 judicial vacancies.

Need

The continuing decline in quality and delayed justice delivery have increased pendency of cases, impaired quality of judgments, and in turn has affected competence of higher judiciary.

- The proposal is to up an AIJS, in the lines of Indian Civil Service, with the hope that AIJS can deal with great many ills Indian judiciary face right now.
- The precise purpose of AIJS is to create a rigorous mechanism for appointment of persons of highest ability, impartiality and integrity to the district courts and to equip the subordinate judiciary in turn to serve as the feeder line for appointment of competent judges to the high courts or eventually the Supreme Court.

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Why oppose?

Some HCs have sought changes in the proposed framework. However, most of the High Courts want the administrative control over the subordinate judiciary to remain with the respective High Courts.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES

SRIKRISHNA COMMITTEE ON ARBITRATION MECHANISM

Why in news?

The ten member committee, under the Chairmanship of Justice B.N.Srikrishna, has submitted its report. It was constituted by the government *to review the institutionalization of arbitration mechanism and suggest reforms thereto.*

Salient Recommendations

1. Setting up an autonomous body called the Arbitration Promotion Council of India (APCI), having representatives from all stakeholders for grading arbitral institutions in India. The APCI will recognize professional institutes providing for accreditation of arbitrators.
2. The APCI may hold training workshops and interact with law firms and law schools to train advocates with interest in arbitration and with a goal to create a specialist arbitration bar comprising of advocates dedicated to the field.
3. Create a specialist Arbitration Bench to deal with such Commercial disputes, in the domain of the Courts.
4. Changes have been suggested in various provisions of the 2015 Amendments in the Arbitration and Conciliation Act with a view to

Arbitration is a well-established and widely used means to end disputes. It is one of several kinds of **Alternative Dispute Resolution**, which provide parties to a controversy with a choice other than litigation. Unlike litigation, arbitration takes place out of court: the two sides select an impartial third party, known as an arbitrator; agree in advance to comply with the arbitrator's award; and then participate in a hearing at which both sides can present evidence and testimony. The arbitrator's decision is usually final, and courts rarely reexamine it.

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make arbitration speedier and more efficacious and incorporate international best practices.

5. International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution(ICADR), which was set up with the objective of promoting ADR methods, to be declared as an Institution of national importance and takeover of the Institution by a statute. It might lead to development of a globally competitive institution.
6. Creation of the post of an International Law advisor to advise and coordinate in matters involving the Union of India, including bilateral investment treaties (BIT)

Importance

These reforms can result in a paradigm shift from the current perception of delay in resolution of commercial disputes in India to it being viewed as an investor friendly destination. The suggested reforms will also lessen the burden of the judiciary

MOTOR VEHICLES BILL IN RAJYASABHA

The Bill of 2016 amends the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 to address issues such as third party insurance, regulation of taxi aggregators, and road safety.

- Under the Act, the liability of the third party insurer for motor vehicle accidents is unlimited. The Bill caps the maximum liability for third party insurance in case of a motor accident at Rs 10 lakh in case of death and at five lakh rupees in case of grievous injury.
- The Bill provides for a Motor Vehicle Accident Fund which would provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India for certain types of accidents.
- The Bill also provides for:
 - amending the existing categories of driver licensing
 - recall of vehicles in case of defects
 - protection of good samaritans from any civil or criminal action
 - increase of penalties for several offences under the 1988 Act.

Key Issues and Analysis

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1. The Bill caps the maximum liability for third party insurance, but does not cap the compensation amount that courts can award. This makes it unclear as to who will pay the remaining amount.
2. State governments will issue licenses to taxi aggregators as per central government guidelines. Currently, state governments determine guidelines for plying of taxis. There could be cases where state taxi guidelines are at variance with the central guidelines on aggregators.
3. While the penalties for contravening provisions of the proposed scheme on interim relief to accident victims are specified in the Bill, the offences that would warrant such penalties have not been specified. It may be argued that imposing penalties without knowing the nature of the offences is unreasonable.
4. The Bill does not address several issues around road safety that have been highlighted by other committees such as: (i) creating road safety agencies, and (ii) improving road design and engineering

THE MEKEDATU ISSUE

Why in news?

The Central Water Commission (CWC) had sought clarification on the proposal made by Karnataka to build a balancing reservoir across Cauvery River at Mekedatu.

What has transpired so far?

Karnataka sought the CWC's permission to start work on Mekedatu project, which has been opposed by Tamil Nadu alleging that it violates the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal order. After this, the CWC had sought a few clarifications.

CWC

It is a premier Technical Organization of India in the field of Water Resources and is presently functioning as an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.

The Commission is entrusted with the general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.

Central Water Commission CWC is headed by a Chairman, with the status of Ex-Officio Secretary to the Government of India.

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WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS

DOING AWAY WITH NO-DETENTION POLICY

Why in news?

The Cabinet has cleared the introduction of the Bill prepared by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to amend **the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009** aimed at *enabling States to do away with the no-detention policy if they wish.*

Backgrounder

Several states had expressed agreement to the idea of ending or tweaking the no-detention policy. States claim that such a move would give a boost to levels of learning. The Bill includes a provision to permit States to introduce exams in Classes 5 and 8.

No-detention policy

The Right to Education Act (RTE) 2010, under the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) introduced the no-detention policy letting students up to class 8 to automatically move up to the next class without being held back even if they do not get a passing grade. The idea was to ensure the completion of elementary education.

Criticism

The criticisms point to compromise on academic rigor and learning levels and quality at schools.

- The TSR Subramanian committee for formulation of the National Policy on Education suggested that 'no detention' policy should be discontinued after Class V. It had recommended restoration of detention provision. As a solution, it offered remedial coaching and two extra chances to each student to move to a higher class

PRIVATISATION IN DISTRICT HOSPITALS

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The Health Ministry and the NITI Aayog have developed a framework to let private hospitals run select services within district hospitals. The framework was prepared in consultation with the World Bank.

Ideas behind the framework

- A single private partner or a single consortium of private partners will be allowed to bid for space in district level hospitals, “especially in tier 2 & 3 cities.”
- Under this Public Private Partnership (PPP), care for only three non-communicable diseases — cardiac disease, pulmonary disease, and cancer care — will be provided.
- The State governments will give Viability Gap Funding (VGF), or one-time seed money, to private players to set up infrastructure within district hospitals.
- The private parties and State health departments will share ambulance services, blood banks, and mortuary services.

Viability Gap Funding

(VGF) means a grant one-time or deferred, provided to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of financial viability. The lack of financial viability usually arises from long gestation periods and the inability to increase user charges to commercial levels. Infrastructure projects also involve externalities that are not adequately captured in direct financial returns to the project sponsor. Through the provision of a catalytic grant assistance of the capital costs, several projects may become bankable and help mobilise private investment in infrastructure.

Government of India has notified a scheme for Viability Gap Funding to infrastructure projects that are to be undertaken through Public Private Partnerships. It will be a Plan Scheme to be administered by the Ministry of Finance with suitable budgetary provisions to be made in the Annual Plans on a year-to-year basis.

Concerns:

- There will be no reserved beds or no quota of beds for free services in these facilities.
- The policy document preparation failed to consult with key stakeholders from civil society and academia.
- Only Below Poverty Line (BPL) patients and those in insurance schemes will be able to access free care. This would effectively exclude hundreds of millions of the Indian population from vital hospital services.

PRADHAN MANTRI VAYA VANDANA YOJANA (PMVVY)

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It is a pension scheme launched by the central govt. exclusively for senior citizens aged 60 years and above.

- The Scheme is implemented through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.

Mode of Pension	Minimum Premium Payment (One-time) (Rs.)	Minimum Pension (Rs.)	Maximum Premium Payment (One-time) (Rs.)	Maximum Pension (Rs.)
Monthly	1,50,000	1,000	7,50,000	5,000
Quarterly	1,49,068	3,000	7,45,342	15,000
Half-Yearly	1,47,601	6,000	7,38,007	30,000
Yearly	1,44,578	12,000	7,22,892	60,000

mymoneysage.in

Provisions

Scheme provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.

- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.
- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/ terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.

On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.

NAI ROSHNI SCHEME

Why in news?

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NITI Aayog had conducted an evaluation study on 'Nai Roshni' and has found that the scheme has made a significant impact on the intended beneficiaries i.e minority women by instilling confidence.

What's the scheme all about?

It is a scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women launched in 2015-16.

The scheme aims to empower and instill confidence among minority women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, Banks and other institutions at all levels.

Implementation

The scheme is implemented through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The scheme is implemented with the involvement of the Gram Panchayat at village level and Local Urban bodies at the District level.

AAJEEVIKA GRAMEEN EXPRESS YOJANA

Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development

It is a sub-scheme under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)

Details about AGEY

Objectives: To provide an alternative source of livelihood to members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) by facilitating them to operate public transport services in backward rural areas.

Outcome: This will provide safe, affordable and community monitored rural transport services like e-rickshaws, 3 and 4 wheeler motorised transport vehicles to connect remote villages for the overall economic development of the area.

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- One of the options proposed to be given under the sub-scheme is that the Community Based Organisation (CBO) will provide interest free loan from its own corpus to Self Help Group member for

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):

DAY-NRLM is being implemented across the country (except Delhi and Chandigarh).

- The financial support under the programme is mainly in the form of Revolving Fund and Community Investment Funds, given as grants to the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations.
- DAY-NRLM also focuses on bank linkage of the institutions.
- The programme has a special focus on women empowerment including a dedicated component for promoting farm and non-farm based livelihoods for women farmers in rural areas.

In addition, start-up enterprises at village levels are also supported to promote entrepreneurial activities in those areas.

purchase of the vehicle.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

Ministry: Ministry of Women and Child Development

Precursor: Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)

About the Yojana

It is a maternity benefit program with conditional cash transfer provision for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births

- It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare
- It provides for conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- In 2013, the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013 to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹ 5,000 stated in the Act.

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- It is Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which the cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40, for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States, it is 90:10 and 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

The scheme mandates Aadhaar linkage, Direct Benefit Transfer of Rs. 5000 in beneficiary's bank/post office account in three instalments at the stage of early registration of pregnancy, after six months of pregnancy on at least one antenatal check-up and registration of child birth & first cycle of immunisation of the child.

A DEBATE ON UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Discussions have been rife about the Universal Basic Income (UBI) and its feasibility to India. The primary objective is to enable every citizen to have a certain minimum income irrespective of whatever their current income is.

Three aspects beg the following questions:

1. Whether it should be 'universal' or 'restricted'?
2. What the level of minimum income is and how this is to be determined?
3. The financing mechanism for implementing such a scheme.

Pros of having a UBI

India has been performing abysmally when it comes to distinguishing the poor from the non-poor. As a result, the poor get very little of what is spent in their name and worse still, many intended beneficiaries are excluded. Also, it is argued that many of the subsidies benefit the rich more than the poor which is the result of wrongful inclusion of beneficiaries.

Cash or Kind?

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Cash gives the discretion to beneficiaries to spend. The underlying assumption is that the beneficiaries would be wise in their discretion.

On the other hand, the provision in kind i.e services or goods, directly to beneficiaries may be directed to achieve certain objectives in terms of nutrition or health or education. Here, the concern is about leakages and quality of service.

A middle path can be adopted with conditional transfers, which means that transfers in the form of cash are subject to the condition that they are spent on meeting defined needs.

India's case

There are a whole lot of services provided by the state, and it would be impossible to knock them off completely and substitute them with general income support. Hence, income support should be thought as a supplement to services already provided. Poor quality of services from government-run institutions has become a matter of concern, towards which a harder look is required.

Universal UBI or restricted UBI?

Most calculations involving the provision of income to one and all are beyond the capabilities of the present Central government Budget unless the basic income is fixed at too low a level. It is extremely difficult to cut so-called implied subsidies or hidden subsidies in order to fund resources. These implied/hidden subsidies range from subsidised bus fares to subsidised power tariff.

The attempt must be to think in terms of reducing the number of beneficiaries using easily definable criteria.

Minimum income

Whether the scheme should be universal or restricted depends on the level of basic income that is proposed to be provided. If we were to treat the cut-off used to define poverty as the minimum income, then the total fiscal burden would be enormous.

One alternative would be to determine the required income supplement from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

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(MGNREGS). The total annual income supplement can be equivalent to 100 days of the wages prescribed under the MGNREGS. This is equivalent to ₹ 20,000 per year. This amount can be treated as the income supplement.

Financing the scheme

- Phase out the MGNREGS, which will realise close to ₹ 40,000 crore.
- Fertilizer subsidies are another item of expenditure which can be eliminated.
- Higher income groups can be requested to forego supplemental income just like in the case of cooking gas.

Several challenges

- The phasing out of food-related subsidies can have unforeseen consequences on food security of the country. Also, whether farmers will continue to produce enough foodgrains in the absence of price incentives remains a big question.
- UBI is also inevitably linked with government withdrawal from other channels of public service delivery. Withdrawal of government support from public goods and necessities like health, education is not justifiable as the weaker section have varied needs which cannot be met simply by transferring money.
- It is also argued that unconditional cash transfers might raise wages due to the decline in the supply of casual labourers.
- Co-ordination between state and central governments to phase out subsidies and tax exemptions will require an extraordinary degree of effort.

In conclusion

UBI has to be supplemented with two distinct sets of reforms:

- Broad-based economic reforms that would strengthen entrepreneurship, remove barriers to job creation, and increase the returns to human capital investments by the poor.
- Specific reforms to allow the poor to gain better education and health.

USHERING IN TELEMEDICINE

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

A telemedicine project started by an Odisha-based social entrepreneur is to serve as a model for the Central government.

Advantages: The government can tackle two problems- unemployment and bad health.

How the system works?

Started in 2009, the unique model focusses on sustainability by training local youth in e-medicine services and enabling them to set up e-health centres in government-run primary health-care centres (PHC), community health centres (CHC) and sub-divisional hospitals.

- These centres create job opportunities on one hand and reach out to lakhs of patients.
- Trained youth can apply for a bank loan to start an e-health centre in PHCs and CHCs.
- A centre is equipped with a laptop with video camera and basic diagnostic testing facilities like blood glucose meter, urine analyser, heart rate monitor, etc.
- The revenue comes from charges for tests and tele-consultation fees. In case patients are covered under any health scheme for the poor, these charges are borne by the scheme.
- The charges for tests and consultation are fixed by the government.

At no cost to the government, these centres help in offering basic testing facilities. Patients suspected to have major illness get the benefit of the telecommunication facility for consultations with senior doctors. These telemedicine centres also create a database of personal health records of every patient walking in for future reference

SHE-BOX

Sexual Harassment Electronic Box is an online complaint management system for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace to ensure the effective implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013.

Ministry: Ministry of Women and Child Development

Details

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

Those who had already filed a written complaint with the concerned Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) constituted under the SH Act are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.

- Once a complaint is submitted to the portal, it will be directly sent to the ICC of the concerned Ministry/Department/PSU/Autonomous Body etc. having jurisdiction to inquire into the complaint.
- Through this portal, WCD as well as complainant can monitor the

The SH Act

The SH Act, 2013 seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. This statute is based on the Vishakha Guidelines, introduced by the Supreme Court of India, for prevention of sexual harassment.

Under the Act, which also covers students in schools and colleges as well as patients in hospitals, employers and local authorities will have to set up grievance committees to investigate all complaints. Employers who fail to comply will be punished with a fine of up to 50,000 rupees.

progress of inquiry conducted by the ICC.

INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN COMMUNITY WELFARE FUND

Why in news?

A revision of guidelines has been approved with regard to the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF). With this revision, the guidelines are made broad-based seek to expand the scope of welfare measures, which are extended by the fund.

- Three key areas covered by the fund:
 - Assisting Overseas Indian nationals in distress situations

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

- Community Welfare activities
- Improvement in Consular services.
- With new guidelines, Indian Missions and Posts abroad get greater flexibility in swiftly addressing to requests for assistance by Overseas Indian nationals.

ICWF

Set up: 2009

Objective: Assisting Overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases.

Sources of Fund: Budgetary support from the Ministry, funds raised by the Indian Missions by levying a nominal service charge on consular services and through Voluntary contributions from the Indian community.

INDIA-JAPAN CIVIL NUCLEAR DEAL

Why in news?

The pact, for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, signed in Tokyo in 2016 entered into force in July 2017.

Significance

The deal will help India access Japan's nuclear market. It is noteworthy that India is the first and the only non-member of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to have signed such a deal with Japan.

- The deal mandates a year's notice before terminating the agreement, in case India breaks the nuclear testing moratorium that it had extended to the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008.
- The deal will bring Japan into the Indian nuclear market where France and Russia have already have a strong presence.

It is a reflection of the strategic partnership between India and Japan and will pave the way for enhanced cooperation in energy security and clean energy

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

INEQUALITY INDEX

Released by: International NGO Oxfam and Development Finance International.

What it measures?

It measures the efforts of governments that had pledged to reduce inequality as part of the sustainable development goals. Focus is on redistributive actions governments can take, rather than those that would prevent rising inequality in the first place.

Performance

India has been ranked 132 out of 152 countries.

- OECD countries headed by Sweden ranked the highest while Nigeria was at the bottom.
- The US had the highest level of inequality among developed countries, though it is the wealthiest country.
- Bhutan, known for coining the term 'Gross National Happiness', is ranked even lower than India at 143.
- Of India's immediate neighbours, all but Nepal (81) and China (87) ranked between 138 and 150.

FIGHT FOR EQUALITY	
Country	Rank
Top 5	
Sweden	1
Belgium	2
Denmark	3
Norway	4
Germany	5
The neighbourhood	
Nepal	81
China	87
India	132
Sri Lanka	138
Pakistan	139
Bangladesh	141
Bhutan	143
Myanmar	150

NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION ACTION PLAN

Released recently, the Action Plan aims to transform cross-border clearance ecosystem through efficient and transparent, risk-based, co-ordinated, digital, seamless and technology driven procedures. The ecosystem will be supported by advanced sea ports, airports, and land borders.

What it means for trade?

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

- ✓ It aims to achieve ease of doing business by reducing cargo release time and cost
- ✓ It promotes paperless regulatory environment which is transparent
- ✓ It creates a predictable legal regime and improved investment climate through better infrastructure.
- ✓ Responsibilities to all regulatory agencies like Customs, FSSAI, Drug Controller, Plant Quarantine, DGFT, etc will be clearly defined.
- ✓ This Action Plan gives a time bound map, which goes beyond WTO's TFA.
- ✓ Even TFA Plus category provisions are covered under the plan.
- ✓ All actions covered under the plan have been categorized by prioritizing the activities into short term, midterm and long term.

Trade facilitation Agreement

The TFA is a part of the Bali Package agreed by members of WTO.

- The provisions relate to faster and more efficient customs procedures through effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues.
- It envisages the provision of greater technical assistance and capacity building in this area.
- It is believed that the deal could add \$1 trillion to global GDP and also can generate 21 million jobs by slashing red tape and streamlining customs.

A WARNING TO ISRAEL

The Arab League has warned Israel over the “red line” of Jerusalem.

What has happened now?

Israel has sent extra troops into the occupied West Bank after violence erupted over Israel's installation of metal detectors at entry points to the Noble Sanctuary-Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem, the holiest site in Judaism and the third holiest in Islam

Palestinians view the new security measures as an Israeli attempt to assert further control over the site. Israel says the detectors are necessary to prevent another incident in which illegal weapons are taken into the compound and turned against Israeli forces.

A backgrounder to the conflict

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

The 1967 war defines today's conflict, as it left Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, two territories home to large Palestinian populations.

Nominally, however, *the West Bank is controlled by the Palestinian Authority but is under Israeli occupation*. Jews have built ever-expanding communities in the West Bank that effectively denies the land to Palestinians. Gaza is controlled by Hamas, an Islamist fundamentalist party, and is under Israeli blockade but not ground troop occupation.

Arab League

The Arab League is a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Arabia.

Established: In Cairo in 1945

Members: 22 members

Recent suspension: Syria since November 2011, as a consequence of government repression during the Syrian Civil War.

Main goal: To "draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries"

CRAFTING A CODE ON SOUTH CHINA SEA

Southeast Asian countries and China have adopted a negotiating framework for a code of conduct in the South China Sea. While it seen as a positive move towards resolution, Some observers term it as a tactic by China to buy itself time to consolidate its maritime power.

Not the first framework

Similar framework was in place since 2002, which has mostly been ignored by claimant states, particularly China, which has built seven man-made islands with runways, surface-to-air missiles and radars, in disputed waters.

What ASEAN countries want?

Signing China up to a legally binding and enforceable code for the strategic waterway has long been a goal for claimant members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), some of which have sparred for years

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

over what they see as China's disregard for their sovereign rights and its blocking of fishermen and energy exploration efforts.

Beijing insists its activities are for defense purposes, in areas it considers its waters. Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, Vietnam and the Philippines, however, all claim some or all of the South China Sea and its myriad shoals, reefs and islands.

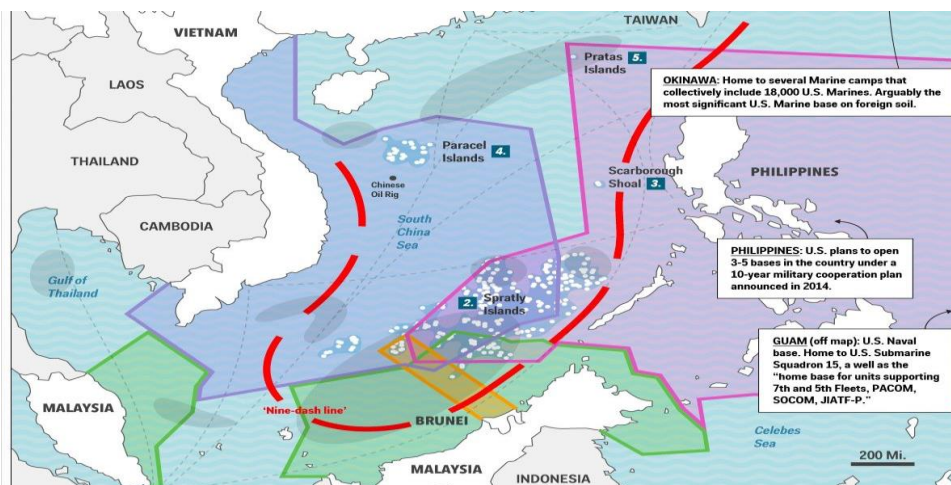
The framework falls short

- Fails to outline as an initial objective
- Does not aim to make code legally binding and enforceable
- Does not even mention dispute resolution mechanism

A backgrounder to the dispute

Beijing claims 90% of the South China Sea, a maritime region believed to hold a wealth of untapped oil and gas reserves and through which roughly \$4.5tn of ship-borne trade passes every year. Adjoining countries contest China's claims to islands and reef systems closer to their territory than Beijing's.

China says it follows a historical precedent set by the "nine-dash line" that Beijing drew in 1947 following the surrender of Japan. The line has been included in subsequent maps issued under Communist rule.



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15TH BIMSTEC MINISTERIAL MEET

This meeting also marks the 20th year of founding of the organisation

Where? Kathmandu

Outcomes

- Endorsed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the establishment of BIMSTEC grid interconnection
- Agreed to expedite the negotiations for BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Agreement.
- Pledged to deepen cooperation for shared prosperity in the region.
- Decided to establish cells focused on areas, like energy, environment and culture, among others, for effective cooperation
- Decided to elevate BIMSTEC as a vibrant and visible regional cooperation.
- Decided to form an eminent persons' group to prepare the future roadmap of BIMSTEC.

BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional organisation which comprises seven member states which lie near the Bay of Bengal.

- This sub-regional organisation was started in the year 1997 through a Bangkok Declaration.

Headquarters: Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Member countries: India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

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GENERAL STUDIES-3

INDIAN ECONOMY

BHARAT 22 ETF

A new Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) **BHARAT 22** was launched to raise capital through disinvestment.

Bharat 22 brings 22 blue chips under one portfolio, thus ensuring a relatively safer investment avenue

- It consists of 22 stocks of CPSE's, PSB's & strategic holding of SUUTI with a well Diversified portfolio with 6 sectors (Basic Materials, Energy, Finance, FMCG, Industrials & Utilities).
- The Bharat 22 Index will be rebalanced annually.
- ICICI Prudential AMC will be the ETF Manager and Asia Index Private Limited (JV BSE and S&P Global) will be the Index Provider.

Mutual Funds	Exchange-Traded Funds
Bought and sold through many channels	Bought and sold through broker-dealers
Not listed on stock exchanges	Listed on stock exchanges
Priced to the end of the trading day	Price continuously determined during trading day
Capital gains within the funds distributed to shareholders	Capital gains within the ETF reinvested; may distribute a capital gain if the make-up of the underlying assets is adjusted.
Dividends may be automatically reinvested	Dividends generally distributed to brokerage account

GENERAL ANTI-AVOIDANCE RULES

The GAAR regime in India started from April 1 with an aim to deter taxpayers from entering into abusive and contrived schemes. The intension of the regime is to avoid misuse and abuse of tax laws, but apprehensions have been expressed as the GAAR gives wider powers to tax authorities.

Why do we want GAAR?

Tax avoidance lies between the two extremes of tax planning and tax evasion. It can be said that Tax avoidance is a form of abusive tax planning complying with the letter, but not the spirit of the law. This might as well include structuring a transaction, setting up companies in tax jurisdictions with low tax compliance, with the sole purpose to avoid taxes (treaty shopping). The objective of GAAR is to curb such practices.

On what basis is GAAR applied?

GAAR is to be applied to an impermissible avoidance arrangement (IAA), which is determined based on the following factors

- 1) purpose of the arrangement is to obtain tax benefit
- 2) It is not at an arm's length price
- 3) It lacks commercial substance
- 4) It results in abuse of the tax law
- 5) It is not carried out in an ordinary manner.

Procedural safeguards have been provided in the form of a three-tier mechanism to remove arbitrariness with the assessing officer, the principal commissioner of income tax and the approving panel (which includes a retired high court judge). A period of six months is allowed to decide the applicability of GAAR.

Issues

- The Indian GAAR provisions has a much wider scope of applicability as compared to other jurisdictions.
- There are concerns such as the interplay between GAAR and DTAAs, the co-existence of GAAR and Specific Anti-Avoidance Rules (SAAR), the scope of conflicting interpretation over IAAs, the functioning of the approving panel, etc.

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- The discretionary powers to invoke GAAR and undo a transaction that complies with the provisions of the existing tax regime may extensively hinder the business environment.

In conclusion

Uncertainties in the tax regime reduces the ease of doing business. There is a need to factor in this ground situation to ensure GAAR does not end up choking efficient tax planning. GAAR will have to strike a balance between revenue collection and tax planning. This certainty will boost investor confidence and create a win-win situation for both the government and taxpayers.

BANKING REGULATION ACT

The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2017 to authorise the RBI to direct banking companies to resolve the problem of stressed assets, seeks to amend the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and replace the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, which was promulgated in May this year.

Significance

It gives powers to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ask any bank to initiate insolvency proceedings and give directions for resolution of stressed assets.

- The RBI would also be empowered to issue other directions for resolution, appoint authorities or committees to advise the banking companies for stressed asset resolution.

Why was this essential?

Stressed assets in the banking system have reached high levels and hence, urgent measures were required for their speedy resolution. Therefore, the government considered it necessary to make provisions in the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 for authorizing the Reserve Bank of India to issue directions to any banking company or banking companies to effectively use the provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 for timely resolution of stressed assets.

NATIONAL ANTI-PROFITEERING AUTHORITY

Why in news?

The GST Council formed a Selection Committee under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary to identify and recommend eligible persons for appointment as the Chairman and Members of the National Anti-profiteering Authority under GST.

What is National Anti-profiteering Authority?

The task of this authority to see that full benefits of a reduction in tax on supply of goods or services flow to the consumers.

Even if the benefit of input tax credit is not passed on to the recipients by way of commensurate reduction in prices, the Anti profiteering measures would be applied.

Powers and functions

The authority is expected to bolster consumer confidence and ensure all stakeholders reap the intended benefits of GST.

- ✓ It has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- ✓ If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund.

In extreme cases the National Anti-profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS

CAG REPORT ON WHEAT ROT

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

The Comptroller and Auditor General, in its audit report on Food corporation of India, has said that more than 4.72 lakh tonne of wheat rotted in Punjab till March 2016 due to delay in implementation of **the private entrepreneur scheme** which was expected to increase the storage capacity of foodgrains in the state.

The PEG scheme 2008 was launched to enhance covered storage capacities as the covered and plinth (CAP)/kacha storage is prone to damage and deterioration of stock and is not an optimum storage method.

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

Set up in 1965, FCI is the main agency for procurement, storage and distribution of food grains under the Food Corporations Act 1964 to implement the following objectives of the National Food Policy:

- Effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the farmers.
- Distribution of foodgrains throughout the country for Public Distribution System.
- Maintaining satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of foodgrains to ensure National Food Security.

Regulate market price to provide foodgrains to consumers at a reliable price.

AGRICULTURE CRISIS LOOMING LARGE

Agriculture now accounts for less than 18% of gross domestic product (GDP), *it is still the main source of livelihood for nearly half our population.* It forms the core of our food security. A severe drought and food shortage would compel India to import food, which would be an uphill task given the sheer quantum required. The rising frequency of farmers' agitations in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere and the high incidence of farmer's suicides are symptoms of a deeper malaise in the sector.

Causes of distress

1. **Fragmentation** of land has been a constant phenomenon due to the exertion of demographic pressure on land: man ratio.

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2. Landless, small or marginal farmers lack the **financial resources** to either buy or lease more land or invest in farm infrastructure to compensate for the scarcity of land.
3. A majority of farmers, i.e., 55% of them, are dependent on the **rainfall**. A weak monsoon or even a delayed monsoon means a significant loss of output. Soil fertility, pests and plant diseases are yet another risk.
4. A better crop would lower the **prices** in the market.
5. Smaller farmers usually do not benefit from the government's **Minimum Support Price(MSP)**. It mainly benefits the large traders who sell grain to the government. Small farmers typically do not have enough marketable surplus to justify the cost of transporting the crop to government corporations in the towns.
6. Agricultural Produce Market Committees (**APMCs**), which were supposed to protect the farmer, have had the opposite effect. Farmers have to sell their produce through auctions in regulated markets controlled by cartels of licensed traders. These cartels fix low purchase prices, extract large commissions, delay payments, etc.
7. The rural youth, especially young males, are **migrating** to the towns and cities for a better future. However, there is not much employment growth and they lack the skills required for a decent job.

Co-operative farming can be a way ahead

The idea has been popular in France, Germany, Kenya and Bangladesh among others. There are several variants of cooperation ranging from collective action in

- a) accessing credit
- b) acquiring inputs
- c) marketing
- d) production
- e) land pooling
- f) labour pooling
- g) joint investment
- h) joint water management
- i) joint production.

Advantages

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

- Induces greater capacity to undertake large scale investment in irrigation and farm machinery
- More efficient farming practices
- Greater bargaining power
- Better terms in the purchase or leasing of land
- Easier access to credit, purchase of inputs and the sale of produce.

Pitfalls and solutions

Internal conflicts may arise due to free riding behavior of participants. Therefore cooperative units should be small groups with relative socioeconomic homogeneity.

- Transparent and participatory decision-making should be practiced, checks and penalties against free riding must be clearly stated.
- Group control over the fair distribution of returns should be made a norm.

Institutional transformation of our small farmer economy into cooperative farming systems on a national scale is a necessity to address the agrarian crisis.

INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

GIS-ENABLED DATABASE FOR AIDING INDUSTRIES

The Geographic Information System-enabled database has details of close to 3,000 industrial parks/clusters, as well as area-wise availability of agricultural/horticultural crops, and mineral production.

Developed by: Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the National e-Governance Division in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as well as the BISAG – an institute for space applications and geo-informatics under the Gujarat Government.

Objective: To eliminate the information asymmetry that is currently adversely affecting the country's industrial policy-making and investments in the manufacturing sector.

What is GIS?

Geographic Information Systems is a computer-based tool that analyzes, stores, manipulates and visualizes geographic information, usually in a map. It is attached to many operations and has many applications related to engineering, planning, management, transport/logistics, insurance, telecommunications, and business.

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

MACHINE-RAISED MOSQUITOES

Who released them? Google's parent company Alphabet and scientists in the US

Aim: To shrink the numbers of the disease-carrying ones.

- ✓ The goal is to cut the numbers of Aedes aegypti mosquitoes — the species responsible for spreading zika, dengue and chikungunya.

Project name: Debug Fresno

Details

The Mosquitoes are sterile, non-biting male mosquitoes

- The male mosquitoes are bred and infected with Wolbachia, a bacterium that is naturally found in at least 40% of all insect species and it sterilises mosquitoes

In a phenomenon called cytoplasmic incompatibility, matings between Wolbachia-infected males and uninfected females result in embryo lethality or low hatch rates

ENVIRONMENT

EXCESS NITROGEN CONSUMPTION

India is the second-highest consumer of nitrogen in the world after China. Indian Fertiliser Scenario 2014, an annual publication of the department of fertilisers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, states that the use of urea in the country has increased by more than 50% since 2000.

Threats of overuse

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

It has led to an imbalance in the nitrogen content in the environment.

- Human-induced nitrogen inputs or fertilisers and associated emissions from agriculture, fossil fuel burning, sewage and industrial waste have directly or indirectly far surpassed natural emissions, causing nitrogen pollution that has reached alarming levels.

An essential nutrient

Nitrogen, which is a vital macronutrient for most plants, in the atmosphere is unreactive and hence cannot be directly used by plants. Traditionally, farmers depended on nitrogen fixing bacteria like Rhizobia, which live symbiotically in the roots of leguminous plants, for converting nitrogen into ammonia and nitrates. With increasing food needs, the natural process was not sufficient to support the plants. Ammonia was produced by combining atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen gas at high temperature and pressure, thus solving the problem.

The Green Revolution, which was instrumental in establishing food security in the developing countries in the 1960s, was driven by artificial nitrogen-fixation. Today, about half of the world's population depends on this process for its nutrition.

A pollutant

Nitrogen, which combines with other organic compounds, is either released into the atmosphere, gets dissolved in water sources such as rivers, lakes or groundwater, or remains in the soil. While it might lead to favourable growth of species that can utilise this nutrient, nitrogen as a pollutant is often detrimental to the environment and health.

- Nitrate-contaminated drinking water can cause reduced blood function, cancer and endemic goiters.
- Surplus inputs of nitrogen compounds have been found to cause soil acidification, which can lead to nutrient disorders and increased toxicity in plants. It may also affect natural soil decomposition.
- It creates of harmful algal blooms and dead zones in our waterways and oceans; the algae produce toxins which are harmful to human and aquatic organisms.

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- Excessive nitrogen fertiliser application contributes to soil nutrient depletion, thus raising the issue of food security
- The release of Nitrous Oxide is essentially a greenhouse gas which is harmful to the environment.

Steps to reduce nitrogen consumption

1. Reducing nitrogen application by precision farming where small quantities of nitrogen are administered routinely instead of large doses applied uniformly over the field.
2. Tablets and coated forms of nitrogen, when applied at the root level, release nutrients slowly.

Supplemented with organic fertilisers and combined with optimal timing of application, sowing and watering, these methods have shown marked improvement over traditional efficiencies of nitrogen.

In Conclusion

Nitrogen is central to India's food production and food security. However, the pollution caused by nitrogen today is due to excess usage and gross mismanagement. The challenge for the current century is to optimise the uses of nutrition while minimising the negative impacts.

'GAJ YATRA'

It is a nationwide campaign to protect elephants, India's Heritage animal

Occasion: was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day, August 12.

Objective: Planned to cover 12 elephant range states, to spread awareness about the conservation and elephant corridors to encourage free movement in their habitat.

Details: The 15 months campaign will be led by **the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)**

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

World Elephant day

World Elephant Day is an annual global event celebrated for preservation and protection of elephants. It aims to share knowledge and positive solutions for the better care and management of captive and wild elephants.

- African elephants are listed as “vulnerable” and Asian elephants as “endangered” in the IUCN Red List of threatened species.

The Wildlife Trust of India is an Indian nature conservation organisation to conserve wildlife and its habitat and to work for the welfare of individual wild animals. WTI was formed in November 1998 in response to the rapidly deteriorating condition of wildlife in India. WTI is a registered charity in India

SC’S BAN ON CHEMICALS IN FIRE CRACKERS

Why in news?

The Supreme Court directed that no firecrackers shall contain the chemicals including antimony, lithium, mercury, arsenic and lead in any form whatsoever. The court entrusted the Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organisation (PESO) with the responsibility of ensuring compliance particularly in Sivakasi. Over 90% of cracker production is done in Sivakasi.

Denial by industry

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

However, cracker manufacturers in Sivakasi denied using the banned chemicals. They claim that the sound and light show is produced by

Colors to firecrackers

Red: Strontium salts (Nitrates, carbonates and sulphates of strontium).

Orange: Calcium salts (Carbonates, chlorides and sulphates of calcium).

Yellow: Sodium salts (Nitrates and oxalates of sodium).

Green: Barium salts (Nitrates, carbonates, chlorides and chlorates of barium).

Blue: Copper salts (Carbonates and oxides of copper).

Purple: A combination of copper and strontium compounds.

White: The burning of metals like magnesium, aluminium and titanium).

chemicals such as sulphur, aluminium powder and charcoal (used as fuel), besides potassium nitrate and barium nitrate (as oxidising agents).

SECURITY CHALLENGES

INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)

The IONS is a regional forum of Indian Ocean littoral states, represented by their Navy chiefs, launched by India in 2008. It presently has 23 members and nine observers.

- It is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues
- It endeavors to enable a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.
- The grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy, now renamed as maritime security.

2017 symposium

Chair: Bangladesh

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

Objective: International Maritime search and rescue exercise(IMSAREX), first of its kind(maiden) organised by the symposium

Significance: Indian Navy will be joining the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy alongside other members and observers of the IONS.

MEGA WAR GAMES BETWEEN INDIA AND RUSSIA

The exercise Indra will primarily focus on achieving coordination between forces of the two countries in a tri-services integrated theatre command scenario.

- **It will be for the first time India will participate in a tri-services exercise with a foreign country**

Significance

The exercise is taking place at a time when India's ties with China have nosedived due to the simmering border dispute and its ties with Pakistan have deteriorated over cross-border terrorism and number of other issues.

A GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON CYBER SPACE

Hosted by: India

Theme for the GCCS 2017: 'Cyber4All: An Inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace'.

Details

The GCCS is taking place outside OECD nations for the first time.

Participants include delegates from senior Government officials, industry leaders, academia and civil society from over 100 countries.

Objective

It seeks to bring together and deliberate on issues relating to promotion of cooperation in cyberspace including norms for responsible behavior.

21st July to 15th August (Set 1)

NEW ADMIRALTY LAW

Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017 has been passed by the parliament.

What are Admiralty laws?

They deal with cases of accidents in navigable waters or involve contracts related to commerce on such waters.

The new Bill repeals laws such as the Admiralty Court Act, 1861, the Colonial Courts of Admiralty Act, 1890 and concomitantly, confers admiralty jurisdiction on all High Courts of the coastal states of the country.

Important provisions

The jurisdiction with respect to maritime claims will vest with the respective High Courts and will extend up to the territorial waters of their respective jurisdictions, which are extendable by the central government. Under the older law, admiralty jurisdiction applies to the Bombay, Calcutta and Madras High Courts only.

The High Courts may exercise jurisdiction on maritime claims arising out of conditions including ownership of a vessel, mortgage on a vessel, environmental damage caused by the vessel, etc.

Courts may exercise admiralty jurisdiction against a person with regard to maritime claims. However, the courts will not entertain complaints against a person in certain cases like damage, or loss of life, or personal injury arising out of collision between vessels that was caused in India, or non-compliance with the collision regulations.

Significance of new law

India is a leading maritime nation and maritime transportation caters to about ninety-five percent of its merchandise trade volume. The repealing of five admiralty statutes is in line with the Government's commitment to do away with archaic laws which are hindering efficient governance.