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Category: POLITY

1. [Plotting social progress](#)

In news:

- The accomplishments of modern India are recognized around the world
- A country that was a symbol of hunger and poverty at the time of Independence and admonished for its Hindu rate of growth during the initial decades has now transformed itself into one of the fastest growing major economies
- These economic achievements are extensive, especially when considering the challenges that arose from following democratic governance after decades of oppressive colonial rule and being a multi-religious secular entity

Economic Growth perspective:

- There have been efforts to track individual social outcomes such as health, education and safety
- The National University of Educational Planning and Administration and the Government of India (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education and Literacy) compute an Educational Development Index for primary and upper primary levels of education that compare States on different aspects on education universalization
- NITI Aayog has rolled out the health, education and water index
- A common measure to quantify the social progress of Indian States that can pinpoint the achievements and the challenges is still missing

Social Progress Index

- A Social Progress Index could bridge this gap
- It would rank States using social and environmental indicators on the basis of their capability to provide for basic needs such as shelter, water, and sanitation, a foundation for well-being
- Along with education, health, and communication facilities
- It would analyze the prejudices that prevail in a region prohibiting people from making their personal decisions
- Also evaluate whether citizens have personal rights and freedom or whether they are susceptible to child labour, human trafficking, corruption, etc

Highlights of a key study results:

- A study was conducted during 2005-2016 to help analyze whether States, especially using social and environmental indicators, are heading in the right direction
- The overall social progress score for the country now stands at 57.03 (on a 0-100 scale), approximately eight points higher than in 2005
- The country performs better in the provision of basic human needs rather than opportunities for its citizens

Inference:

- All the States have climbed the social progress ladder, with the group of States that had the worst performance in 2005

- Tripura, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Bihar are now showing improvement
- This suggests that States with a relatively low level of social progress can improve rapidly
- Also the fact that the States that have achieved a threshold level of social progress, driving improvements becomes more difficult
- Average improvement was the lowest among the group of States that were categorized as “Very High Social Progress” in 2005
- The greatest improvements have been in areas where social progress most often accompanies economic prosperity
- Areas, where performance has declined or stagnated, is where the correlation with economic development is weak
- “Access to Information & Communication and Inclusion” depicts a strong relationship with per capita GDP and are the ones that have improved the most over the years
- “Health and Wellness & Environmental Quality”, that are least correlated with economic development, have eroded

Way Forward

- The overall findings show that while the economy is on the right track, there is an urgent need to identify and focus on social parameters. The reliance on the idea that economic development will automatically transform social conditions will hamper further improvements in social progress. Social progress needs to be stimulated by focussing on policies directly targeting social issues

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Raja Mandala: Commonwealth in the time of Brexit

Context:

Importance of commonwealth for India

Key Points:

- With the upcoming visit of Prince of Wales to India, India and the UK have an opportunity to think afresh about the future of the Commonwealth
- In the past an archaic anti-colonial view has distorted India’s view of the commonwealth
- And it was no surprise then that the Indian leadership stayed away from the last three Commonwealth summits in Malta, Colombo and Perth for one reason or another.
- He is coming to India to invite PM Narendra Modi to attend the Commonwealth Summit in London in April 2018
- The London Summit of the 52-nation forum, formally called the “Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting” is significant for many reasons

Significance of the summit

- Charles is likely to take over from Queen Elizabeth as the head of the organisation
- As the largest country in the Commonwealth, India will have a key role in formalising this transition
- An even more important change is Britain’s impending separation from the European Union
- After the separation, the UK is making a big push to reconnect with its historic partners in the Commonwealth and the Anglosphere
- The UK wants commonwealth should have greater role in resolving contemporary global problems like climate change, urbanisation and sustainable development

India’s Concern:

- The political conservatives in India, who dismiss the Commonwealth as a relic from the past, may not find Charles too persuasive
- Delhi’s lack of interest in the Commonwealth in recent decades was reinforced by the preoccupation with
 - (1) Managing the complex relationships with its immediate neighbours
 - (2) Reordering its ties with the major powers
 - (3) And becoming part of regional institutions like the Association of the South East

Nehru and Common wealth:

- Despite considerable opposition from the Indian National Congress and many others, Nehru decided to join the Commonwealth.
- Nehru understood that the Commonwealth and British connection gave India a measure of flexibility in a world engulfed by the Cold War
- It allowed him to maintain a substantive political and economic link to the West even as he refused to become part of its alliance system

Importance of Commonwealth for both India and the UK

- For a Britain that is reinventing itself politically after Brexit, the Commonwealth has become an important forum to recalibrate London’s international relations
- For a rising India, the Commonwealth is the most natural theatre to demonstrate its credibility as a “leading power”

The way forward

- The question today, then, is no longer about whether India and Britain should resurrect the Commonwealth, but how
- Modi’s consultations with Charles this week should be the first step towards a revival of the Commonwealth at the London summit next April

Category: HEALTH ISSUES

1. [Tuberculosis cases: Govt announces steps to check under reporting](#)

Directions given by the Union health minister:

- The union health ministry has asked private hospitals to notify all cases of the disease reported in their facilities
- The government is aiming to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) by 2025
- The aim is to check under-reporting of tuberculosis, which has been flagged as a major area of concern by UN health agency World Health Organisation (WHO)

Other steps by the government

- The ministry will also set up two 24X7 call centres "in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh" so that patients can avail all information related to the disease by calling up these toll free numbers
- The ministry has also roped in the Indian Medical Association for further sensitisation of the health institutions

Key Facts:

- According to a report by the WHO, despite the reduction, India topped the list of seven countries accounting for 64% of the 10.4 million new tuberculosis cases worldwide in 2016
- India along with China and Russia accounted for almost half of the 490,000, multi drug-resistant TB (MDR- TB) cases registered in 2016

Category: ECONOMICS

1. [Crude oil futures surge to Rs 3,630 per barrel](#)

Key Points:

- Crude oil futures rose 83 per cent to Rs 3,630 per barrel as speculators widened their positions amid a firm trend overseas.
- At the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for December delivery was trading higher by Rs 30 or 0.83 per cent at Rs 3,630 per barrel in 62 lots.
- On similar lines, crude for delivery in current month was trading higher by Rs 29 or 0.81 per cent at Rs 3,608 per barrel in a business turnover of 1,416 lots.
- Analysts said rise in crude oil futures was largely in tandem with a firm trend in global market where prices hit their highest levels since July 2015 as markets tightened, while Saudi Arabia's crown prince cemented his power over the weekend through an anti-corruption crackdown that included high profile arrests.
- Meanwhile, the US benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude prices surged 12 cents or 0.22 per cent to \$55.76 a barrel, and Brent crude climbed 20 cents to \$62.27 a barrel.

2. [One year of demonetisation: Digital transactions fail to gather steam after initial surge](#)

Key Points:

- After an initial surge in digital payments, largely attributed to a shortage of cash in the banking system, digital transactions have seen a dip. This indicates a slow reversal in the usage of digital platforms
- This is despite doubling of point of sale (PoS) machines in merchant establishments across the country
- Mobile wallets have also seen a dip in volumes and value of transactions after the initial surge
- Unified Payment Interface (UPI), the payment platform of NPCI "promoted by RBI" had a slow takeoff even after the launch of BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money), which uses the UPI platform. The value of transactions through UPI are much below one percent of the total electronic payments in the country
- Bankers and analysts said a complete switch back to pre-November 8 trends has not happened. It shows the possibility that there has been some behavioral change in transactions patterns
- At a modest 11 percent, the country's electronic personal consumption expenditure (ePCE) rate is a far cry from some leading economies with ePCE rates upwards of 60 percent

True reality:

- With over 800 million debit cards and over 30 million credit cards in the market, almost every household in India now has access to a digital payment
- This has not yet translated into digital transactions
- At 3 times growth in payment volumes and over 3.5 times growth in transactions, consumers are beginning to enjoy the benefits of the debit card beyond its use as an ATM withdrawal instrument
- The year after demonetisation was driven by innovation, mainly new mobile applications allowing merchants to receive digital payments via UPI, Link Based, Bharat QR Scan & Pay to mPOS

GST & digitization

- GST has given the much-needed boost to the digitization initiative
- It will now be difficult to make cash deals anymore with digital trails of every transaction

Way forward

- Both the government and the regulators need to continue the initiatives taken by them
- Principle-based policies, regulation versus current approach of product or entity based regulations, seamless access to payments network and other critical payments infrastructures like UPI and RTGS will make sure that incentives continue to grow for digital transactions

1. [Climate meet begins: India pushes developed countries to deliver](#)

Context

- FIJI set the stage for the fresh edition of the climate change conference, urging the world to commit itself to a 1.5 degree celsius limit on global warming, rather than a two-degree target, as it moves towards finalising the rule-book for the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement.
- The two-week conference, an annual year-end affair, is being held under the shadow of the decision of the USA administration to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement, a move that severely undermines the goals and objectives of that agreement.
- On the opening day of the conference, however, there were no overt references to the US decision, even though that was the big subject of discussion in informal conversations.
- The US is participating in the conference, since its withdrawal cannot become effective until 2020, but its delegation remained silent on the opening day.
- India and other "like-minded developing countries" are a group of about 25 nations made an early intervention on Monday in a fresh bid to force the developed countries to deliver on their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, the precursor to the Paris Agreement, which still has three years to go before expiring in 2020.

Doha developments:

- Amendments made to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol in Doha in 2013 extended the mandate of developed countries to take targeted cuts to their greenhouse gas emissions till 2020.
- The earlier mandate was to make emission cuts between 2005 and 2012.
- The Doha amendments are yet to become operational because they haven't been ratified by enough countries.
- Ratification of the Doha amendments was not included in the agenda of the current conference, which India and some other countries objected.
- They argued that the conference must decide on a deadline, possibly sometime next year, for every country to ratify the Doha amendments.
- The developed countries are trying to avoid their responsibilities under the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol is not yet dead. There is still plenty that can be done within Kyoto Protocol provided there is intention to do so.
- Developing countries will continue to press for early operationalisation of the Doha amendments so that we can see some action being taken in the pre-2020 period as well.
- Fiji, the host and president of the conference, agreed to consider the suggestion by India and other countries, and appointed a facilitator to hold consultations.
- Fiji, which, like many other small island nations, is facing the worst impact of rising sea levels as a result of climate change, insisted that countries should adopt a 1.5 degree target.
- Small island countries are the most vocal in supporting the 1.5 degree target, threatened as their existence is by the rising seas.

The Paris Agreement

- The Paris Agreement wants the world to prevent the rise in global temperature beyond 2 degree celsius from pre-industrial levels, though it acknowledges that the effort to contain the temperature rise to within 1.5 degree celsius must not be abandoned.
- In the next two weeks and the year ahead to do everything we can to make the Paris Agreement work and to advance ambition and support for climate action before 2020.

Way Forward

- A greater effort is needed from the developed countries and big emitters in reducing their emissions.
- Aiming for 1.5 degrees is a serious challenge. But it provides a mission to the countries and engages their capacity for ingenuity, for organisation and sheer hard work.
- And may be the target will be achieved when humanity's capacity to innovate is unleashed.
- The latest scientific assessments indicated that the world was actually moving towards a 3 to 5 degree celsius temperature rise.
- A new report by WMO also showed that the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere had crossed 403 parts per million, the highest ever.
- Scientists believe that concentrations of 450 ppm would lead to catastrophic and irreversible damage to the earth.

Nothing here for Today!!!

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F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

1. Talks regarding international monetary system
2. Talks regarding refugee crisis
3. Talks at WTO regarding world trade
4. None

G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper I

1. Indianness is not confined to the sectarian prejudices of some of the self-appointed guardians of Indian culture. Illustrate with examples.

1. Under the Indian Constitutional and Legal framework, what constitutes Hate speech? How does it violate Fundamental Right to Equality enshrined under Article 14?