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B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY

1. [TN appeal on NEET quota dismissed](#)

Context

- **Tamil Nadu State Government Notification:** provided 85% reservation for students from State Board schools in admissions to undergraduate medical courses under the State quota and 15% to students from other boards.
- **Madras High Court quashed the above order:** The HC had found the government order violative of the right to equality and discrimination.

In news

- **Supreme Court Order:**
- Merit remains the sole criterion in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for State Board and CBSE students.
- Upheld Madras High Court order.

2. [Push for law to ensure transparency rules](#)

In news

- The government could consider introducing a new law to ensure transparency of rules.
- **Present problems faced by citizens** : it is not easy for ordinary citizens [and businesses] in India to navigate the multitude of rules, regulations, forms, taxes and procedures imposed by various tiers of government. Moreover, these rules frequently change and sometimes contradict each other
- **Transparency of Rules Act (TORA)** " recommended by the Economic Survey, stressing that the "opaque mesh" of regulations prevalent in India not only make life difficult for citizens who cannot feign ignorance of the rules as a valid defence, but also act as a magnet for corruption and endless litigation.
- The TORA is an attempt to change in some ways the relationship between the average normal citizen and the State.

3. [Allow payment, live-in couples: House panel for more liberal surrogacy Bill](#)

Recommendation of a Parliamentary Standing Committee:

- More liberal norms that will allow live-in couples, divorced women, and widows to choose surrogates is the need of the hour
- It has recommended that couples should be allowed to choose surrogates from both within and outside the family

- The Panel also favoured the decision to debar foreigners from availing of surrogacy services in India
- Committee: The committee is a 31 member Parliamentary Committee on Health and Family Welfare

Criticism of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016 by the panel

- It criticized the exclusion of live-in partners from the ambit of the legislation
- According to the panel, the bill talks about compensation rather than altruism as the guiding principle of surrogacy, the panel finds this anti-women

Basic Information:

The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016

- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016 was introduced in Lok Sabha on November 21, 2016 and referred to the standing committee
- According to the bill, surrogacy is allowed for infertile Indian married couples where the woman is between 23-50 years and the man is between 26-55 years
- Also, couple cannot have a surviving child, either biological or adopted

4. [Do not touch](#)

Context:

- The government's reply last month to the Supreme Court, saying that the questions raised in a petition challenging Article 35A require a larger debate

What is Article 35A?

- It was added by a 1954 presidential order issued under Article 370, the constitutional provision that mediates the relationship between the Union of India and Kashmir
- Article 35A of the Indian Constitution is an article that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define 'permanent residents' of the state and provide special rights and privileges to those permanent residents.

Who is a permanent resident?

- The 1956 J&K Constitution defines a Permanent Resident as one who, apart from being an Indian citizen, was a state subject on May 14, 1954, or a resident of the state for 10 years, and owns immovable property in the state.

Apprehensions

- Government's new legal pro-activism against Articles 35A or 370 will lead to more alienation in the Valley.
- In the Valley, the government's reply on 35A is being seen as paving the way for moves to do away with Article 370 that excludes J&K from most laws enacted by Parliament, except through presidential orders that have the concurrence of the J&K Legislative Assembly
- Court has also asked the Centre to respond to a petition challenging Article 370.
- All this has served to strengthen suspicions that the Centre is using the legal route to bring about the changes that it wants

Category: HEALTH ISSUES

1. [It's time to focus on the toxic air we breathe](#)

Context:

- Niti Aayog released the draft National Energy Policy.
- Several public policy research and civil society organisations criticised the policy from various standpoints.

Public health and growth

- It ignores is public health, especially in the context of the energy mix envisaged under the NITI Ambition Scenario
- Ambition Scenario is a tool to arrive at a range of possible energy futures for the energy sector till 2040.
- National Health Policy of 2017 views reducing air pollution as vital to India's health trajectory.
- However, the National Energy Policy neither reflects nor supports the commitment outlined by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Ministry

Air pollution menace

1. WHO reports that air pollution is the number one environmental health risk. In 2012, about 3 million premature deaths were attributable to ambient air pollution.
2. Children are most affected by air pollution and will be the primary beneficiaries of policies to reduce fossil fuel emissions.
3. Research has also established links between public health and a nation's economic growth.
4. Joint study by the World Bank and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation found that the aggregate cost of premature deaths due to air pollution was more than \$5 trillion worldwide in 2013 alone.
5. In East and South Asia, welfare losses related to air pollution were about 7.5% of GDP.

WHO's Health Indicators of Sustainable Energy

- It lays out a few core and expanded indicators that can help monitor the progress of a nation's energy policy.

- The core indicators address issues related to health equity where health impact assessments become an integral part of energy policy design and implementation.
- It stress on the need to develop baseline data by generating emission inventories and source apportionment of urban air pollution that can inform mitigation and intervention policies.

Way forward

- National Energy Policy have to strive to minimise the unavoidable health impacts of energy production, and their associated health costs, especially given the policy's stated objectives of sustainability and economic growth.
- It should include a health impact assessment framework to weigh the health hazards and health costs associated with the entire life cycle of existing and future energy projects and technologies
- Ensure that policies directed at energy security are compatible with public health goals.

A. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. [Growth likely to be in the lower range, closer to 6.5%](#)

Context:

- **Key highlight of Second volume of Economic Survey:** Macroeconomic indicators pointing to a deceleration trend.

In News:

- The second volume of the Economic Survey was tabled in Parliament .
- The Indian economy's growth in 2017-18 is more likely to be closer to 6.5% than 7.5%, according to Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian.
- Many indicators – credit growth, index of industrial production, Gross Value Added, manufacturing, investment – all point to the same direction of deceleration in growth.
- **Demonetisation impact:** demonetisation of high-value currency notes by the government last November, could be one possible reason which intensified deceleration in real activity.
- **Short-term challenge ahead:** The real challenge now is short-term growth and we need to bring to bear all the policy tools that we have to revive short-term growth.
- **Farm loan waivers:** waivers will act as a "drag on growth" rather than have an inflationary impact.
- **Growth drag reasons:**
- **Rising stress in the telecom and power sectors:** new entrant in telecom reducing prices for consumers and in power, renewable (energy) shocks would help climate change in the long run. But in the short run, both are having an impact on balance sheets of companies, demand and growth.
- The appreciation in the rupee's exchange rate and the high real interest rates, especially when inflation targets have been "over-achieved" for nearly a year and are likely to stay below the 4% target on an average through 2017-18, are also dragging down growth.

2. ["Ease norms for airlines to fly abroad"](#)

Speedbreakers ahead

Flagging an uncertain fiscal outlook for the current year, the Economic Survey released on Friday said achieving the higher end of the 6.75–7.5% GDP growth will be difficult.

Risks ahead

- GDP, core GVA, IIP, credit, investment and capacity utilisation point to deceleration in real activity
- Bottlenecks in supply of fruits and vegetables
- 7th Pay Commission awards
- Farm loan waivers
- Recent exchange rate appreciation

Encouraging developments

- 3.5 lakh new registrants on GST portal
- In-principle decision to privatise Air India
- Actions taken to address stressed bank and corporate balance sheets
- Structural downward shift in inflation
- Dip in cash holdings due to impact of demonetisation

The real challenge now is short-term growth and how we respond to that. We need to bring to bear all the policy tools to revive short-term growth.

—ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN, Chief Economic Adviser

Context:

- The Economic Survey has suggested a mix of protectionism for domestic airlines and liberal norms for flying abroad to bolster their share in international air traffic.

Economic Survey report observations

- Large increase in capacity entitlements under bilateral air service agreements with foreign countries has helped the foreign carriers in gaining a large share in the international traffic to and from India as the domestic carriers have underutilised their rights.

Key fact:

- Roughly 38% people fly in and out of India through Indian carriers and the rest 62% from foreign carriers.
- UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and the

Guarded growth forecast The Survey said that fiscal tightening and dipping profits in power and telecom are weighing on the economy.	The Good • Real economy grew by 7.1% in 2016-17 compared with 8% the previous year • Annual inflation was 5.9% in 2014-15. It declined to 4.5% in FY17 • Green shoots slowly becoming visible in merchandise trade with rising reserves • Growth in new tax payers at 45.3% in FY17 vs 25.1% in FY16 • Export growth witnessed after a gap of two years	The Bad • Farm loan waivers could reduce demand by 0.7% of GDP • RBI shifts monetary policy stance from accommodative to neutral • Currency in circulation contracted by 19.7% & reserve money contracted by 12.9% • Gross NPA ratio of banks rose from 9.2% in September 2016 to 9.5% in March 2017 • Industrial performance moderated from 8.8% in 2015-16 to 5.6% in 2016-17
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- South East Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand as the top destination of passenger traffic to and from India.
- These countries were invariably used as stop-overs or hubs by their respective airlines to carry passengers onward to USA, Canada, Europe, among others.
- Indian domestic airlines have a very lower share in international traffic to and from India.

Factors responsible

1. Foreign airlines utilising the sixth freedom of the air
2. Expansion of capacity entitlements under bilateral air service agreements with foreign countries
3. Lower utilisation of India's own capacity entitlements
4. The 0/20 rule and fleet constraints.

What is Sixth freedom?

- Sixth freedom is the bilateral air traffic right to fly from a foreign country to another foreign country while stopping in one's own country.
- For instance, Emirates operates flight between India and the UK while stopping at Dubai, its home state.
- The Survey said this has reduced the share of direct long haul flights for Indian carriers from 25% in 2011-12 to 20.5% in 2015-16.

0/20 rule

- A domestic airline needs to deploy at least 20 planes on the domestic sector before getting the right to fly on international routes from India.
- The Economic Survey said the 0/20 rule should be further diluted.

Diluted 5/20 rule

- In its **National Civil Aviation Policy** released in 2016, the Central government had diluted the contentious 5/20 rule that required an Indian airline to have five years of domestic flying experience and 20 aircraft in its fleet before it can fly to overseas destinations.
- According to the present norm, known as the 0/20 rule, a domestic airline needs to deploy at least 20 planes on the domestic sector before getting the right to fly on international routes from India. The Economic Survey said the 0/20 rule should be further diluted.

Air India's disinvestment plans

- According to the survey Air India's disinvestment will also help India regain international share.
- There is a need for committed action plan on privatization or disinvestment of national carrier Air India to enhance its operational and management efficiency because it is a major carrier of international traffic to and from India, accounting for 11.4 per cent of the total international travel.

3. [Survey backs U.P. model on farm loan waivers](#)

In news

- The Economic Survey assumes that other States will follow Uttar Pradesh's example and waive farm loans, taking the full waiver amount to ₹12-2.7 lakh crore.

Survey Observations

- Only a few States have the fiscal space for such waivers, and so most will have to either cut expenditure or increase taxes.
- The total impact of waivers could be to lower demand by as much as 0.7% of the GDP.
- **Increase the net wealth of farm households** : loan waivers are assumed to increase aggregate income by 28%, consumption is estimated to increase by 7% or about ₹155,000 crore.
- Andhra Pradesh, U.P, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh have no fiscal room to waive farm loans, States such as Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka and Gujarat have ample space.

Waiver and the Four effects

The Survey says the waivers will have four effects on aggregate demand:

1. On private consumption impact via increases in private sector net wealth,
2. Public sector impact via changes in government expenditure/taxes,
3. Crowding out impact via higher borrowings by State governments, and
4. Crowding in impact via higher credit availability as bank NPAs fall.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Not everything labelled 'organic' passes muster, finds study](#)

Context

- Traces of new-generation chemical pesticides found in fruits and vegetables branded as “organic”™
- Samples were tested by Kerala Agricultural University.
- Organic produce is often sold at higher prices than conventional greens at separate counter in hypermarkets

In news

- The report from Pesticide Residue Research & Analytical Laboratory (PRRAL) coming under the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) contains test results of vegetables, fruits, spices and condiments sampled from public markets, including hypermarkets, across the districts in Kerala, during the period from April to June 2017.

For Example

- A sample of “organic”™ labelled green capsicum purchased on June 16, 2017 from a prominent hypermarket in Ernakulam was found contaminated, with the presence of seven chemical pesticides including five insecticides: acetamiprid (1.12 parts per million), clothianidin (0.72 ppm), imidacloprid (0.69 ppm), buprofezin (0.12 ppm), acephate (1.78 ppm) and two fungicides, tebuconazole (0.84 ppm) and iprovalicarb (0.22 ppm).
- Baji chilli marked “pesticide-free” contained three new-generation insecticides: acetamiprid, metalaxyl and chlorantraniliprole.

New equipment used

- Detection of a number of new generation pesticides even up to trace levels of parts per billion (nanogram/Kg), which were not previously reported, has now become possible with a new **liquid Chromatograph-Mass Spectrometer** (LC-MS/MS) apparatus imported from the US.

Inference

- The results indicated regular spraying of a cocktail of new generation insecticides and fungicides at close intervals to protect the crop in farms and polyhouses in other States

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E. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

F. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper II

1. “Children are most affected by air pollution and will be the primary beneficiaries of policies to reduce fossil fuel emissions” Evaluate?

GS Paper III

1. Recently, the Niti Aayog released the draft National Energy Policy. Discuss its provisions related to health and pollution.