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Articles of the day - THE HINDU (17-12-2019)

I

INDEX

1. RTI 'abuse' led to 'fear' among officials: CJI...GS-2
2. Citizenship Act rules get ready...GS-2
3. Unfulfilled promise...GS-2
4. Govt. releases Rs. 35,298 cr. in GST compensation...GS-3
5. 'If India has to grow faster, States have to grow faster' ...GS-3
6. Climate of inaction...GS-3
7. RBI kept out Muslim long-term visa holders from property-buying right...GS-3

II

Prelims & Mains practice questions

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

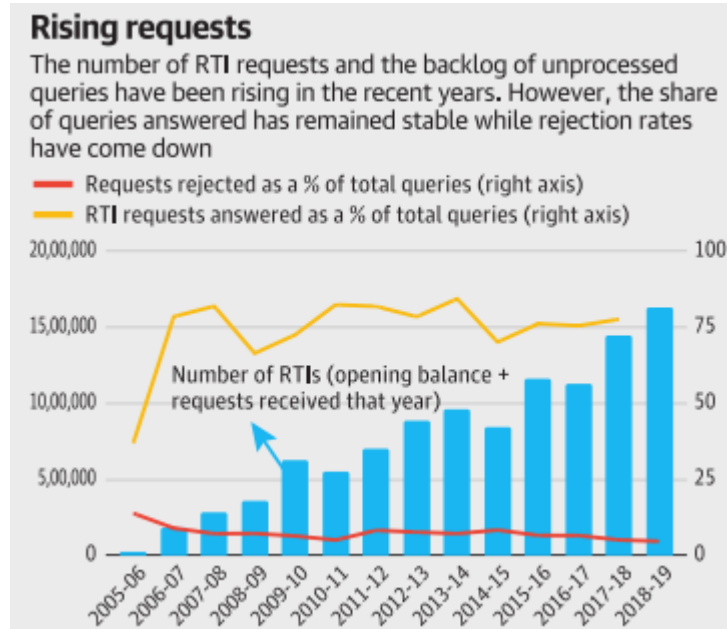
1. RTI 'abuse' led to 'fear' among officials: CJI

Context:

The Supreme Court was hearing an application about the lack of transparency in the appointment of information commissioners.

Details:

- The Supreme Court has directed the Centre and the state governments to appoint within three months information commissioners in the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions.
- It has also said that there was a need to evolve guidelines to stop misuse of the Right to Information Act.



Issue:

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad Arvind Bobde has said that the unbridled use of the Right to Information (RTI) Act had created a sense of “paralysis and fear” in the government and norms were needed to “filter” the requests.
- There is the serious problem of people filing RTI requests with malafide intentions, people set up by rivals.
- The CJI highlighted that the RTI Act had become a source of criminal intimidation by people.

Way forward:

Besides highlighting that the court was not against the exercise of the right to information, the Chief Justice has said that guidelines need to be laid down to check the locus of the RTI applicant and put a filter on the kind of requests made under the 2005 Act.

2. Citizenship Act rules get ready

Act explained

Select provisions of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act:

- It inserts December 31, 2014 as the cut off date for non-Muslim communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to be eligible for the Indian citizenship
- It reduces the mandatory requirement of 12 years stay in India to five years to be eligible for citizenship
- All cases against illegal non-Muslim migrants, before any authority shall stand abated



■ The Act shall not apply to tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland

Context:

- President Ram Nath Kovind has given his assent to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019, turning it into an act.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 has amended the Citizenship Act of 1955, which grants Indian Citizenship to the Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists and Christian from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Features of CAB 2019

- The Bill seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to make Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, eligible for citizenship of India. In other words, the Bill intends to make it easier for non-Muslim immigrants from India's three Muslim-majority neighbours to become citizens of India.
 - The legislation applies to those who were "forced or compelled to seek shelter in India due to persecution on the ground of religion". It aims to protect such people from proceedings of illegal migration.
- The amendment relaxes the requirement of naturalization from 11 years to 5 years as a specific condition for applicants belonging to these six religions.
- The cut-off date for citizenship is December 31, 2014, which means the applicant should have entered India on or before that date.
- The Bill says that on acquiring citizenship:
 - Such persons shall be deemed to be citizens of India from the date of their entry into India, and

- All legal proceedings against them in respect of their illegal migration or citizenship will be closed.
- It also says people holding Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards – an immigration status permitting a foreign citizen of Indian origin to live and work in India indefinitely – can lose their status if they violate local laws for major and minor offences and violations.

Exception

- The Bill adds that the provisions on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
 - These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.
- It will also not apply to the areas under the Inner Line Permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.
 - The Inner Line Permit regulates the visit of Indians to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

3.Unfulfilled promise

Context:

The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology in December 2019.

Details:

- The Bill, which was tabled in Parliament by the Electronics and IT Minister, has now been referred to a joint committee.
- There are concerns that India's efforts to protect the personal data of its citizens falls short of privacy requirements.

Concerns:

Recent events:

- There were some concerns raised when the messaging platform WhatsApp said that some Indian journalists and rights activists were among those spied using technology by an Israeli company, which by its own admission only works for government agencies across the world.

- Google too had alerted 12,000 users, including 500 in India, regarding “government-backed” phishing attempts against them. The Indian Government has still not come out in the clear convincingly regarding these incidents.

Exemption for Government agencies:

- The bill rightly requires handlers of data to abide by globally-accepted rules like getting an individual’s consent first, but it disappointingly gives wide powers to the Government to dilute any of these provisions for its agencies. The bill exempts the government from many safeguards in the bill.

Draft bill recommendations:

- Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee’s report forms the basis of the current Bill.
- In its report, the committee noted that the dangers to privacy originate from state and non-state actors.
- The draft bill, therefore, called for exemptions for the government to be “watertight”, “narrow”, and available for use in “limited circumstances”.
- The committee had also recommended that the Government bring in a law for the oversight of intelligence-gathering activities, the means by which non-consensual processing of data takes place.

Data Protection Authority:

- A major concern about the Bill is regarding the constitution of the Data Protection Authority of India, which is to monitor and enforce the provisions of the Act.
- It will be headed by a chairperson and have not more than six whole-time members, all of whom are to be selected by a panel filled with Government nominees.
- This completely disregards the fact that Government agencies are also regulated under the Act; they are major collectors and processors of data themselves.

Against the right to privacy:

- The sweeping powers the Bill gives to the Government renders meaningless the gains from the landmark K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India case, which culminated in the recognition that privacy is intrinsic to life and liberty, and therefore a basic right. That idea of privacy is certainly not reflected in the Bill in its current form.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Govt. releases Rs. 35,298 cr. in GST compensation

Context:

The Central government has released GST compensation of Rs.35,298 crore to States and Union Territories.

Background:

- States have expressed apprehensions about not getting their compensation on time or at all, with some alleging that they had to incur debts to meet the expenses predicated on GST compensation monies.
- The Centre had written to States voicing concern that due to lower GST collections, the compensation cess might not be enough to pay for the losses arising out of the adoption of the tax system.
- While the government had budgeted for Rs. 6,63,343 crore in GST collections for the current fiscal, 2019-20, it had garnered only about 50% of its budget estimate in the first eight months.
- The GST Act promises states enough compensation from the Centre to keep their annual revenue growth 14% for five years despite any likely loss due to the implementation of the indirect tax regime.
- Most prevalent indirect taxes were subsumed by the new GST structure, which came into effect on July 1, 2017, and states are eligible for the compensation till 2021-22.

Issue:

- A few states demanded the release of the Goods and Services Tax compensation due to the states from the Centre, following the Central government's delay in releasing GST compensation.
- The states raised the opinion that the Centre should raise the cess, if needed, to compensate the States and continue to compensate the States for the funds' shortfall incurred on introducing GST.
- The Centre then wrote to all States voicing concern that due to the lower Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections, the compensation cess might not be enough to pay for losses arising out of the tax system.

States' Demands:

- Some states are demanding that the cut-off date for ending compensation to the States be moved from 2021-22 to 2026-27.

- The states have raised the opinion that the Centre should raise the cess, if needed, to compensate the States and continue to compensate the States for the funds' shortfall incurred on introducing GST.
- The government of Punjab has even said that it may take the matter to the Supreme Court if the Centre does not release the dues. Before that, the GST Council which has a dispute redressal mechanism for any disputes among the members of the council needs to be given a chance to address the concerns.

5. 'If India has to grow faster, States have to grow faster'

Context:

Views expressed by the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister regarding the economy.

Details:

Growth slowdown:

- The Indian economy's growth rate is expected to be around 5% for the current financial year. This marks a slowdown from the previous rates of growth.

Reasons for the slowdown:

- For four successive years, GDP growth was about 9%. During those four successive years, the exports GDP ratio was about 20%. Exports grew 15-20% plus in dollar terms.
- This points to the fact that at least 3 percentage points of the GDP growth were because of exports. Given the global economic slowdown and trade protectionism, the exports have fallen. If exports are not doing well then the GDP growth would be lesser as is being observed.

Solutions and associated concerns:

- To present the slowdown as a binary of structural versus cyclical or demand-side versus supply-side driven factors is completely unwarranted.
- The current slowdown needs to be dealt with.

Focus on states:

- Given the fact that with the exception of railways and defence, 90-95% of the national income is generated in the States, if India has to grow faster, the States have to grow faster.
- The data on the States' GSDP notes that half the States are growing at less than 6%.
- The growth multiplier of expenditure by State governments is almost twice that of expenditure by the Central government. This points to the need to prioritizing attention on the State governments' expenditures as well.

Structural reforms:

- Structural reforms in the domain of land, natural resources, labour, privatization, etc. have been pending since 1991.
- Structural reforms are important and necessary but there are obstacles in the way of structural reforms. The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the judiciary and environment clearances have resulted in tardy progress of the reforms in the past indicating that they are not that easy.

Fiscal stimulus:

- A fiscal stimulus from the Central government can boost the economy.
- Fiscal stimulus is generally implemented through either taxes or expenditure.

Government Expenditure:

- A large part of the growth has come from government expenditure.
- But there are limits to government expenditure due to the FRBM [Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003]. Though a temporary deviation from the FRBM is always possible in the current circumstances, there are limits to that too.
- A large part of government expenditure is committed – salaries, pensions, interest payments, centrally sponsored schemes, schemes that are legislation-mandated thus limiting the avenue for the more desirable capital expenditure with the potential to raise growth rates.

Taxation: Direct Tax:

- The Finance Ministry has hinted that it is having a relook at the direct tax rates because the corporate tax rate has come down but the MSMEs don't pay the corporate tax rate, they pay the personal income tax rate.
- There is also a proposal for a reduction in personal income rate to 15% for some income brackets provided taxpayers agree to give up exemptions they enjoy currently.
- Direct taxes have to have an element of progressivity. So, it cannot be 15% for everyone and also have exemptions at the same time.
- Having reduced personal income tax rates and exemptions at the same time is not tenable. Increased number of exemptions will lead to a system that is discretionary and completely ad hoc making it difficult to formalize such a system.

Indirect Tax:

- There have been calls for raising the rates of GST given the lack of revenue being generated through it and the delay in compensation payments to the states.
- The GST has to be simplified. Previous analysis has shown that the average GST rate ought to be 16% to make it revenue neutral. Presently, the average GST rate is 11.6% because a large number of items are at 0%.

- To make the GST a simpler tax, the 28% [highest bracket GST rate] has to come to 18%, which finds popular support but there is no support to move some products out of the 0% bracket, which is being opposed. Also in the midst of a growth slowdown, it is a bad idea to increase the tax rates.
- The growth slowdown has been mainly attributed to a consumption slowdown. Raising the rates of GST, which, being an indirect tax, is non-progressive since it will only further curtail consumption due to reduced disposable income.
- What items can be brought under GST is a decision of the GST Council which will need consensus between the states and the centre.
- Decreasing the GST rates will limit government expenditure capabilities. If the objective is to address the issue of lack of disposable income in the hands of the poor, it is best not to do it through indirect tax policy but other means.

6. Climate of inaction

Context:

The 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference concluded without any major progress or announcement regarding the global effort against climate change.

Details:

- The 200 delegates representing rich and poor countries meeting at the UN climate change conference had the benefit of new scientific reports regarding climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Reports:

- The IPCC in its previous reports had warned that even 1.5 degrees of warming would wreak havoc on the planet. Another report outlined both the already-observed impacts and the likely future of lands and forests. The latest report, on the oceans and ice caps, rounds out the trio.
- In its Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, it outlines the damage climate change has already done to the planet's vast oceans and fragile ice sheets and forecasts the future for these crucial parts of the climate system.
- The ocean has borne the brunt of the impacts, absorbing over 90 percent of the extra heat trapped in the atmosphere by excess greenhouse gases since the 1970s and somewhere between 20 to 30 percent of the carbon dioxide. That means water has buffered land-dwellers against the worst effects of climate change; without it,

the atmosphere would have heated up much more than the average of 1 degree it already has.

- The oceans, polar ice caps, and high mountain glaciers have already absorbed so much extra heat from human-caused global warming that the very systems human existence depends on are already at stake.
- For example, Planpincieux glacier on the Italian side of Mount Blanc is expected to collapse at any time, prompting road closures and evacuations of structures in the area. And in the oceans, many fisheries have shifted and shrunken, impacting million-dollar businesses and subsistence fishers alike. The 27 percent of Earth's human population that lives near coasts are bearing the brunt of higher seas and stronger storms. Marine "heat waves" sweep across the ocean twice as often as they did only three decades ago. And millions that rely on water from high-mountain glaciers and snowpack, the "water towers" of the world, are adjusting to both newly strengthened floods and devastating droughts.

United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report 2019:

- According to the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report 2019, even if all countries do what they had agreed in the NDCs, the global temperature would increase by 3.2°C by 2100. Not only that, countries – particularly the already rich who have disproportionately used up the carbon budget – are not even doing what they have agreed to do.
- This simply means that if all countries followed this rate of emissions, then the temperature would rise between 2 and 4°C by the end of the century.

Concerns:

- Despite the availability of scientific reports pointing to the dangers of climate change and the inadequacy of the current global efforts the international community via the UN conference in Madrid still failed to increase ambition on mitigation, adaptation, and finance to tackle the climate crisis.

Mitigation:

Carbon market mechanism:

- Carbon markets continued to be an issue of deep division at the 25th Conference of Parties (CoP 25) in Madrid.

Importance of Carbon markets:

Given the failure of the countries to limit emissions within their quotas, the idea of net-zero emissions seems a good way forward. What this means is that countries will stay below their target that is they will emit GHG emissions, but they will find ways of soaking up or burying the emissions so that in their balance sheet they are net-zero.

- There are two approaches to accomplish the goal of net-zero emissions. One being Sequestration. Afforestation would sequester carbon dioxide (CO₂). Then, carbon sequestration technologies would suck CO₂ from the atmosphere and bury it deep underground.
- The other approach to net-zero emissions involves buying carbon credits by investing in carbon-friendly projects in other countries and adding them to their balance sheet.
- This is where the discussion on markets becomes critical. It is also a fact that planting trees in vast villages of Africa or Asia are much cheaper than in Europe or Japan. Markets are being designed so that there can be an **investment in** developing countries for carbon capture and credits which have been another major demand in global climate policy.

Concerns with the carbon market mechanism:

The approach:

- Though the carbon market mechanism will contribute to global climate actions the overall objective should be to incentivize countries to do more at home and then to buy whatever remains through global trading systems.
- Only those projects should be funded that would be transformational, and not transitional, in the developing world. We could avoid first polluting and then cleaning up.

Current system:

Article 6 of the Paris Regime creates two types of carbon markets. Article 6.4 creates a centralized global market referred to as the Sustainable Development Mechanism (SDM). This is a successor to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol.

- The key issues regarding Article 6.4 are whether credits created under the CDM will be carried over to the SDM, how to ensure that the mechanism delivers an “overall mitigation of global emissions” and how to ensure that one credit will only be counted toward the national target of one country (referred to as avoiding “double counting”).
- Carry-over of credits from the CDM needs to be avoided because the four billion low-quality credits still usable from the CDM have the potential to tank the new Paris Agreement markets.
- The cheapest-first approach of the CDM generated a lot of credits with **dubious accounting**; that market may have contributed to an increase in global emissions.
- Developed and large developing countries, seem to be more aligned on prioritizing a market mechanism that churns out large quantities of credits, with quality being a secondary consideration.

Enhancing the goals:

- The Paris Agreement mandates an updation of the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in 2020.
- Despite the worrying scientific evidence available and the need for urgent action, there was the notable absence of reference to the aspect of updating of NDCs in the draft of the CoP 25 document.
- The final declaration merely expressed serious concern at the emissions gap in seeking to limit the temperature increase to 1.5° C and laid out no future solutions.

The rulebook for the Paris deal:

- The finalisation of the rulebook has been put off, yet again, to next year's CoP 26 to be held in Glasgow, which will put great strain on next year's agenda. It may well put a squeeze on the attention devoted in next year's CoP to the crucial question of raising the level of climate ambition in the next round of Paris targets.

Adaptation:

- Review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, response measures for climate affected nations and communities did not find much traction in the discussions.
- The losses from extreme weather events that climate-vulnerable countries, India included, are facing with frightening regularity were not considered. The insured losses worldwide itself during 2017 and 2018 together stood at a record \$225 billion, while the bulk of destruction had no such risk cover.
- Climate negotiators have avoided addressing the more intractable questions – creating a strong framework to address loss and damage from climate events and transferring technology to poorer countries on reasonable terms and postponed the negotiations to the next conference.
- The US had an issue with the global goals on adaptation which it wanted to be removed from the text.

Finance:

- The Warsaw Mechanism has been resisted by these countries due to their paranoia that the provision of finance would imply an admission of legal liability. The creation of a financial mechanism dedicated to loss and damage was kept out of the agenda due to this reason.
- Financial support is one of the work streams of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM), which was set up in 2013. Work on this front has remained stagnant for six years, and vulnerable countries and activists were clear that COP25 needed to establish secure, new and additional finance for loss and damage.
- The debate coming into this CoP was initially centred on whether this finance would take the form of a finance arm of the WIM – opposed by developed countries because they consider it an admission of liability for climate change or a financing 'window' under the Green Climate Fund (GCF) – opposed by developing countries because it would risk diluting the distinction between loss

and damage and adaptation, and effectively reducing the amount of finance available for both.

- The raising of \$100 billion a year from 2020 for developing countries still has not fructified.
- Delegates from almost 200 nations endorsed a declaration to help poor countries that are suffering the effects of climate change, although they didn't allocate any new funds to do so.

Positives:

- **The** new 5-year gender action plan which takes into account the challenges faced by women and indigenous people was a significant step towards drawing attention to the enhanced effect of climate change on these vulnerable sections.
- This, in fact, might be the only reference to human rights in the document, which has been a demand made by civil society groups all through CoP 25.

Way forward:

Europe green deal:

- One of the promising models that will be closely studied in the global climate action framework would be the Green Deal that has been announced by the European Commission, with binding targets for member nations to cut emissions by at least 50% by 2030 and go net-zero by 2050.
- This approach could potentially make the EU the leader in global climate action, a position that the U.S. never adopted, and China will take longer to aspire for.

India:

Global climate action:

- India has argued that unless a stocktaking exercise of the fulfillment of various pre-2020 commitments by developed countries (such as those made at Copenhagen, Cancun and Kyoto) showed that they were making significant progress, India would not raise its climate ambition for its next round of Paris Agreement targets due in 2020.
- It is entirely appropriate for countries such as India to insist on not taking on an even more unfair share of the global mitigation burden unless developed countries deliver on the minimal parameter of fulfilling their existing promises.
- It is crucial that India continues to push developed countries in this fashion as the entire global climate action framework has been put in jeopardy by the inaction of big polluters.

Domestic Measures:

- India's own status as a low per capita carbon emitter offers little comfort as its overall emissions are bound to grow. With a low base compared to other major nations, it may well achieve its initial voluntary targets under the Paris Agreement, but a shift away from fossil fuels is inevitable in the longer term.

- As it prepares to face calls for higher ambition in 2020 and beyond, India has to involve its States in mitigation and adaptation efforts.
- Given the higher vulnerability of India to climate change, the death and destruction by frequent storms, floods and droughts should lead to urgent cohesive action.

7. RBI kept out Muslim long-term visa holders from property-buying right

With the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) coming into force, the spotlight is now on a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) circular issued back in March 2018. The circular allowed the now beneficiaries of the Act to buy immovable property.

The RBI notification, under the Foreign Exchange Management (Acquisition and Transfer of Immovable Property in India) Regulations, 2018, said, “A person being a citizen of Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, belonging to minority communities in those countries, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, who is residing in India and has been granted a Long Term Visa (LTV) by the Central government may purchase only one residential immovable property in India as dwelling unit for self-occupation and only one immovable property for carrying out self-employment.”

Since these guidelines were issued, under the foreign exchange management regulations, these were issued after consultation with the government. The RBI had allowed citizens of Bangladesh or Pakistan, belonging to the same set of minority communities in those countries, who were residing in India and had applied for an LTV to open one NRO Account.

“[NRO Account] will be opened for a period of six months and may be renewed at six-monthly intervals subject to the condition that the individual holds a valid visa and valid residential permit,” the RBI norms said.

Prelims practice questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to the **Citizenship Amendment Act:**

1. The Act gives eligibility for Indian citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan.
2. The Act does not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Act gives eligibility for Indian citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The Act does not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

2) **"StrandHogg"** sometimes seen in the news recently is?

- a. Dwarf Planet orbiting in the Kuiper Belt
- b. An Epidemic rapidly spread in East African region
- c. The World's fastest Super Computer
- d. None

Answer : d

The Union Home Ministry has recently sent an alert to all States warning them about the vulnerability of the Android operating system to a bug called 'StrandHogg' that allows real-time malware applications to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kind. While all versions of Android, including Android 10, are vulnerable to this bug, it may not be apparent to the affected users that malware applications are already on board their device. These malware can then potentially listen to their conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, make calls, record conversations

and get login credentials to various accounts. This apart, things that such malware can access include private images, files, contact details, call logs, and location information.

3) Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Matrutva Vandana Yojna (PMMVY)

1. Under the scheme, the mother is entitled to a cash incentive of Rs. 5,000 in three instalments.
2. The scheme covers all Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.
3. It was implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development under the provisions of Maternity benefit (amendments) Act, 2017.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 2 and 3 only

Answer : a

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) or Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana, was formerly known as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY). It is a social welfare maternity benefit programme implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development under the provisions of National Food Security Act, 2013. The programme is run by the Government of India and was introduced in 2016.

All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), excluding those in regular employment with the Government or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being are eligible. Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who are eligible will receive a cash benefit of Rs.5,000/- in three installment. The cash incentive is payable in three instalments for the first live birth, as normally, the first pregnancy of a woman exposes her to new kind of challenges and stress factors.

4) Consider the following statements with respect to National Ganga Council

1. The council was constituted in 2016 to oversee the cleaning of the Ganga and is supposed to meet at least once a year.
2. Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation will be the ex-officio Chairperson of National Ganga Council.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently chaired the first meeting of the National Ganga Council in Kanpur. The council was constituted in 2016 to oversee the cleaning of the Ganga and is supposed to meet at least once a year with the Prime Minister chairing the session.

5. **Global Gender Gap Report 2020** was released recently by which of the following?

- a. UNESCO
- b. World Economic Forum
- c. UN Development Programme
- d. Organization for economic cooperation and development

Answer : b

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, 2020 was released recently. According to the report, India moved down the ladder from its 108th position last year to rank below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th). India is 112th among nations ranked in terms of the gap between genders, and it was among the bottom five for women's health and survival and economic participation. Iceland remained the world's most gender-neutral country. Yemen is ranked the worst (153rd), while Iraq is 152nd and Pakistan 151st.

- 1. Gender Inequality Index - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- 2. Global Gender Gap Index - World Economic Forum
- 3. Gender Parity Index - UNESCO
- 4. Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Report - Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD)

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Destruction of public property as directed by the Supreme Court

1. The prosecution should be required to prove that public property had been damaged in direct action called by an organisation.
2. The burden of proof can be shifted to the accused to prove his innocence.
3. The Nariman Committee dealt with extracting damages for destruction of public properties.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 3 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d

While agreeing to hear petitions on alleged police excesses on students in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, a Supreme Court Bench headed by CJI expressed displeasure over rioting and destruction of public property. The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 punishes anyone “who commits mischief by doing any act in respect of any public property” with a jail term of up to five years and a fine or both.

However, the Supreme Court has on several earlier occasions found the law inadequate, and has attempted to fill the gaps through guidelines. Supreme Court issued guidelines based on the recommendations of the 2 expert Committees. The Thomas Committee recommended reversing the burden of proof against protesters. Accepting the suggestion, the court said that the prosecution should be required to prove that public property had been damaged in direct action called by an organisation, and that the accused also participated in such direct action. From that stage the burden can be shifted to the accused to prove his innocence.

Such a reversal of the burden of proof is applicable in cases of sexual violence, among others. Generally, the law presumes that the accused is innocent until the prosecution proves its case. The Nariman Committee’s recommendations dealt with extracting damages for destruction. Accepting the recommendations, the court said the rioters would be made strictly liable for the damage, and compensation would be collected to “make good” the damage.

Mains practice questions

1. The implication of Nation Register of Citizens (NRC) being proposed for the entire country by different sections of society and the government would be far and wide. Discuss. Analyse does India need a countrywide NRC in the light of NRC exercise in Assam?

Approach

1. Briefly introduce NRC and the sections that pitch for countrywide NRC
2. Discuss Implications of countrywide NRC
3. Analyse the fallouts of NRC in Assam and then make deductions for Countrywide NRC
4. Conclusion

2. Government aims to double farmers' real income by FY23. How is the fertilizer policy linked to agricultural progress? In this context, how effective is policy of fertilizer subsidization?

Approach

1. Discuss the link of fertiliser policy to agricultural progress. For example, highlight the food security India achieved through fertilizer use.
2. Briefly discuss the current fertiliser policy of India.
3. Explain the distortionary effects of subsidised fertilizer policy.
4. Give policy suggestions to rationalise the fertilizer policy. Include examples like DBT to farmers.
5. Conclusion