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AUGUST

01.08.2021

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India and China to hold 12th round of talks today

Context:

- India and China are scheduled to hold the 12th round of Corps Commander talks.

Background:

- Based on an earlier agreement India and China had as a first step agreed on **disengagement from all friction areas**, after which **de-escalation of the massive troop build-up** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was to be taken up. Finally, **new guidelines for patrolling the contested areas** were to be finalized.
- As a part of this agreement, India and China had completed disengagement from the banks of Pangong Tso. Since then, however, there has been no progress on further disengagement and de-escalation despite several rounds of talks.
- Indian and Chinese troops remain in a **tense stand-off at Gogra, Hot Springs, Demchok and Depsang Plains**.

Details:

- The focus of the scheduled talks would be working out an agreement for the second phase of disengagement from Gogra and Hot Springs in Eastern Ladakh.

2. Delta Variant as contagious as Chicken Pox: CDC document

In news According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) document, the Delta variant of the coronavirus is as contagious as chickenpox.

About Delta variant

- SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant, also known as lineage B.1.617.2, is a variant of lineage B.1.617 of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- It was first detected in India in late 2020.
- The WHO named it the Delta variant on 31 May 2021.

Key findings of the Document

- Delta variant probably causes more severe disease than past strains.
- A review of findings from other countries shows that each person with Delta infects on average eight others, making it as transmissible as chickenpox but still less than measles.
- The breakthrough cases in vaccinated individuals may be as transmissible as unvaccinated cases. Also, the breakthrough infections in vaccinated people are highly contagious.
 - - **A breakthrough infection** occurs when someone who is fully vaccinated contracts the virus. Such infections are to be expected with any vaccines since they are never 100 percent effective at blocking infection
- Vaccine efficacy estimates vary across countries, but the CDC estimates the risk of severe disease or death is reduced 10-fold or greater in the vaccinated person, while risk of infection is reduced three-fold or greater.

3. BRICS plan to counter terror finalised

In news The BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan that will strengthen counter-terror cooperation among the members of the grouping has been finalised.

- The plan is one of the key deliverables during India's Chairship of BRICS.
- The Plan will be adopted at the meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors scheduled in Aug 2021.
- The Action Plan is aimed at further strengthening result oriented cooperation between BRICS countries in areas such as preventing and combating terrorism, radicalisation, financing of terrorism, misuse of internet by terrorists, and curbing travel of terrorists.

What is BRICS Counter Terrorism Strategy?

- BRICS unveiled a counter-terrorism strategy to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the member countries for effectively combating the threat.
- The new strategy was adopted at the bloc's annual summit which was held virtually in November 2020.
- **Aim of the strategy:** To improve the practical cooperation among security and law-enforcement authorities of the member nations to prevent and combat terrorism, including by sharing timely and accurate information.
- **Focus:** To “suppress” the facilitation of terrorist groups, entities and associated persons by not making available financial and material resources to them.
- The BRICS also resolved to counter “extremist narratives” conducive to terrorism and vowed to take steps to ensure that the Internet and social media platforms are not used for recruitment and radicalisation by terror groups.
- The BRICS high representatives for security shall review the implementation of this strategy.
- **Implemented by:** The BRICS counter-terrorism working group (CTWG).
- **Significance:** These efforts will help prevent “further geographical expansion of terrorism” and address the threats posed by terrorists returning from conflict zones to countries of departure or travelling to third countries.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Ozone levels exceeding permitted levels: study

Context:

- A Centre for Science and Environment **study on ozone levels in Delhi-NCR.**

Ozone:

- While stratospheric ozone protects living things from ultraviolet radiation from the sun, **ground-level ozone is considered a pollutant** given the adverse health problems it gives rise to.

Ozone formation:

- Ozone is a **secondary pollutant**. Tropospheric, or ground-level ozone, is not emitted directly into the air, but is created by **chemical reactions between**

oxides of nitrogen (NO_x) and volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the presence of sunlight (photochemical reaction).

- Emissions from cars, power plants, refineries, chemical plants, and other sources are the major sources of NO_x and VOC.
- Ozone is most **likely to reach unhealthy levels on hot sunny days** in urban environments.

Harmful effects:

- Ozone is a **highly reactive gas** and when inhaled it **can damage the lungs**. Relatively low amounts of ozone can cause chest pain, coughing, shortness of breath and, throat irritation. It may also **worsen chronic respiratory diseases** such as asthma as well as compromise the ability of the body to fight respiratory infections.
- Elevated exposure to ozone can **affect sensitive vegetation and ecosystems**. In particular, ozone can harm sensitive vegetation during the growing season.

Details:

- Contrary to the notion that ozone is predominantly a summer phenomenon, **the study found ozone levels exceeding the permitted levels even during winter** in Delhi-NCR.
- The study notes that despite the lockdown, more days and locations witnessed a higher and longer duration of ozone spells.

Concerns:

- Ozone is becoming more widespread in Delhi and NCR across all seasons.
- The presence of Ozone in large quantities in the winter season is all the more concerning because it makes the **smog in winter seasons more toxic**.

Recommendations:

- There needs to be a refinement of clean air action plan to **add strategies for ozone mitigation**, with strong action on vehicles, industry and waste burning which constitute the major sources of NO_x and VOC.
- Some of the strategies could involve the following:
 - Vapour recovery nozzles at the petrol pumps to reduce refuelling emissions
 - Cleaner burning fuels reformulated to reduce VOC, NO_x and other pollutants
 - Strict NO_x emission limits for power plants and industrial combustion sources
 - Enhanced vehicle inspection programs and

- Strict limitations on solvent usage in factories.

5. Govt. introduces Bill on insurance firms

Context:

- The Union government has introduced the **General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill** in the Lok Sabha.

Background:

- The Finance Minister in the **Budget 2021-22** had announced a big-ticket privatisation agenda, including **privatisation of two public sector banks and one general insurance company**.
- The minister had stated that this move would require legislative amendments.

Details:

- As per the statement of objectives and reasons of the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021, it seeks to **remove the requirement that the central government holds not less than 51 per cent of the equity capital in a specified insurer**.
- Thus the amendment will **allow the government to reduce its stake in state-owned insurers**.

Significance:

- The bill will **allow the general insurance companies to raise money from the retail participants**. This will help provide a **bigger financial resources base** for the public sector general insurance companies. This will allow them to offer better premium and innovative packages for the public and enable the infusion of technology in their functioning.
- The amendment will provide for greater private participation in the public sector insurance companies and will **help enhance insurance penetration and social protection** and better secure the interests of policyholders and contribute to faster growth of the economy.

Concerns:

- Several opposition members had opposed the introduction of the bill, saying it will bring in foreign investors and **entail total privatisation of PSU general insurance companies and the critical insurance sector**.
- Notably, the finance minister has clarified that though the aim is disinvestment it won't lead to privatisation of the general insurance sector.

6. Bill to Amend General Insurance Law

In news The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill 2021 was introduced in Lok Sabha

What are the Key amendments of the Bill?

- The Bill will amend the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972.
- The Bill proposes three amendments.
- The first aims to omit the provision (Section 10B) which requires that the Central government should hold not less than 51% of the equity capital in a specified insurer.
- The second amendment is to insert a new Section 24B which will provide for ending the application of the Act to such a specified insurer on which the Centre ceases to have control.
- And, the third amendment is also to insert a new Section 31A, making a director (not a whole-time director), liable only for acts of omission or Commission.
- Although the Bill allows the government to bring down its shareholding below 51%, it was clarified that this is not a Bill for privatisation.

Do you know?

- As on date, there are four public sector general insurance companies – National Insurance Company Limited, New India Assurance Company Limited, Oriental Insurance Company Limited, and United India Insurance Company Limited.
- It is not yet decided in which one of the companies the government will lower its shareholding.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021:

Context:

The Bill which was introduced in Lok Sabha recently would pave the way for **the government to divest its stake in general insurance firms.**

- Opposition members have however strongly objected to it and called for its withdrawal.

Key Provisions:

1. It proposes amending **the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972 to remove the requirement for the Centre to hold at least 51 percent of equity in an insurer.**
2. Another provision ensures that **the 1972 Act stops applying to insurers on and from the date the Centre ceases to have control over them.**
3. The Bill also makes a director, who is not a whole-time director, liable only for acts of omission or commission committed with his knowledge and connivance by the insurer.

Rationale behind these changes:

While India's insurance sector has been growing dynamically in recent years, its share in the global insurance market remains abysmally low. The Bill aims to provide for greater private participation in the public sector insurance companies.

Criticisms/concerns:

1. This may lead to total privatisation of general insurance companies.

2. With this, the government will also lose money by way of dividend in the proportion of shares being offered.

Challenges in the Insurance sector:

1. Low penetration and density rates.
2. Inadequate investment in insurance products.
3. The dominant position and deteriorating financial health of public-sector players.

Important changes witnessed by the insurance sector over the years include:

1. Nationalisation of life (LIC Act 1956) and non-life sectors (GIC Act 1972).
2. Constitution of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) in 1999.
3. Opening up of the sector to both private and foreign players in 2000.
4. Increase in the foreign investment caps.

2. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana:

Context:

The government has said that under the schemes implemented by **the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DA&FW)** at least 30 percent of the expenditure allocated for agricultural schemes is being incurred for women to bring them into mainstream agriculture. This mainly includes **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana**.

- It was started in 2011.
- The “Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana” (MKSP) is a sub component of **the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM)**.
- It seeks to improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities available to empower her.
- MKSP recognizes the identity of “Mahila” as “Kisan” and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.

- Upto 60% (90% for North Eastern States) of the funding support for such projects is provided by the government.

The focus of MKSP is on:

Capacitating smallholders to adopt sustainable climate resilient agro-ecology and eventually create a pool of skilled community professionals.

Need for feminization of agriculture:

Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. Arctic Science Ministerial:

Context:

Information regarding India's participation in **the 3rd Arctic Science Ministerial (ASM3)** was recently given in Parliament by the Government.

- It was **jointly organised by Iceland and Japan and is the first Ministerial meeting held in Asia.**

The theme for this year is 'Knowledge for a Sustainable Arctic'.

Background:

- The first two meetings – ASM1 and ASM2 – were held in the USA in 2016 and Germany in 2018, respectively.
- The meetings are designed to provide opportunities to various stakeholders to enhance collective understanding of the Arctic region, emphasize and engage in constant monitoring, and strengthen observations.

Need for international collaboration and cooperation in maintaining the Arctic region:

Arctic warming and its ice melt are global concerns as they play a pivotal role in regulating climate, sea levels, and maintaining biodiversity. Moreover, there is growing evidence of connection between the Arctic and the Indian Ocean (which modulates the Indian monsoon).

Hence, improving the understanding of physical processes and quantifying the impact of Arctic ice melt on the Indian summer monsoon is very important.

India and the Arctic:

- India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to 1920 with the signing of **the Svalbard Treaty in Paris**.
- Since July 2008, India has had a **permanent research station in the Arctic called Himadri at NyAlesund, Svalbard Area in Norway**.
- It has also deployed a multi-sensor moored observatory called **IndARC in the Kongsfjorden fjord since July 2014**.

India's contributions further in Arctic:

- The country would deploy open ocean mooring in the Arctic for long-term monitoring of upper ocean variables and marine meteorological parameters.
- The launch of **NISER (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) satellite mission**, in collaboration with the USA, is underway. NISER aims to conduct global measurements of the cause and consequences of land surface changes using advanced radar imaging.
- India's contributions to **the Sustained Arctic Observational Network (SAON)** are continuing.

4. AERA Amendment Bill, 2021:

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA) Amendment Bill, 2021 and seeks to amend **the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008**.

Background:

The 2008 Act established the **Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA)**. AERA regulates tariffs and other charges (such as airport development fees) for aeronautical services rendered at major airports in India.

What are the new provisions?

1. The 2008 Act designates an airport as a major airport if it has annual passenger traffic of at least 35 lakh. As per the Bill, **the central government may also designate any airport as a major airport by a notification.**
2. It will allow **AERA to regulate tariff and other charges** for aeronautical services for not just major airports with annual passenger traffic of more than 35 lakh, but also a group of airports.
3. **Profitable Clubbing:** The government will be able **to club profitable and non-profitable airports** as a combination/ package to bidders to make it a viable combination for investment under PPP (Public-Private Partnership) mode.

Need for reforms:

- Typically, airports run the risk of becoming a monopoly because cities usually have one civilian airport which controls all aeronautical services in that area.
- **To ensure that private airport operators do not misuse their monopoly**, the need for an independent tariff regulator in the airport sector was felt.

Benefits of the new legislation:

1. Helps in improving and expanding the air connectivity to relatively remote areas expediting the UDAN regional connectivity scheme.
2. Encourages the development of smaller airports.

5. Strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) programme:

Context:

Two more commercial-cum-strategic facilities at **Chandikhol and Padur** of 6.5 MM storage capacity to be established under **phase-2 of SPR Programme. M**

Background:

Under **Phase I of strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) programme**, Government of India, through its Special Purpose Vehicle, **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL)**, has established petroleum storage facilities with total capacity of 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) at 3 locations, namely (i) Vishakhapatnam (ii) Mangaluru and (iii) Padur.

About the SPR Programme:

Strategic petroleum reserves are **huge stockpiles of crude oil** to deal with any crude oil-related crisis like the risk of supply disruption from natural disasters, war or other calamities.

- The petroleum reserves are **strategic in nature and the crude oil stored in these reserves will be used during an oil shortage event, as and when declared so by the Government of India.**
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)**, a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

Need for strategic oil reserves:

1. In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
2. To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with Indian Consumption increasing, the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

6. Law and lawmakers: On criminal acts and legislative privilege

Context: Recently, Supreme Court ruled that legislative privilege cannot be extended to provide legal immunity to criminal acts committed by lawmakers in Legislature.

The privileges and immunities enjoyed by the MPs and MLAs include:

1. Freedom of speech in the house which means they cannot be prosecuted for saying or doing anything in the house.
2. They have the freedom from arrest 40 days prior or after a session of legislature or during the session or from the premises of the legislature without the permission of the house.
3. The legislature has the power to regulate its internal affairs – that covers the behaviour including disruptions, vandalism and violence – of the house. Police or courts cannot interfere.

However, the members can be punished for the breach of privileges by the house itself. Punishment includes imprisonment, fine or suspension.

Brief Background of the Case

- The case relates to criminal prosecution against six MLAs of the Left Democratic Front (LDF).
- They were being prosecuted for creating ruckus in Kerala Assembly in 2015 (when they were in opposition).
- The Kerala government, when LDF came to power, moved to withdraw the cases against them.
 - Kerala State government argued that the criminal prosecution of MLAs was not sustainable because the acts committed by them on the floor of assembly are protected by legislative privileges under Article 194 of the Constitution
- The recent SC judgement has denied this permission to withdraw the cases.
- Supreme Court ruled elected representatives could no longer go scot-free for acts of vandalism and violence committed inside a house claiming immunity provided under the Constitution.
- The change is a Supreme Court's judgment. It does not directly deal with Parliament but with state legislatures

Judgment assumes National Significance because

SC made certain observations that may form the behavioural guide for all elected representatives including the MPs & MLAs

- “The destruction of property in the assembly cannot be equated to freedom of speech in the house”
- An alleged act of destroying public property within the House cannot be considered “essential” for their legislative functions.
- “Privileges and immunity are not a gateway to claim exemptions from criminal law and that would be a betrayal to the citizens.”
- “The purpose of bestowing privileges on legislators is to enable them to perform their legislative functions without hindrance or without fear or favour. Legislators should act within the parameters of the public trust imposed on them to do their duties.”

Way Ahead

- Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson Harivansh had, in 2020, mooted an idea of evolving a ‘Parliament Disruption Index’. The idea had emerged at the conference of presiding offices of legislative bodies in Dehradun on November 2019 in the backdrop of increasing disruptions in Parliament.
- In the Lok Sabha, some members proposed automatic suspension of members who cause disruption and rush to the Well of the House. But the proposals are still in a nascent stage.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. In the Constitution of India, promotion of international peace and security is included in the:

- a. Preamble to the Constitution
- b. Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)
- c. Fundamental Duties
- d. Ninth Schedule

Answer: b

Explanation:

Article 51 of the Indian Constitution which is a Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), states the state shall endeavour to :

1. promote international peace and security and maintain just and honourable relations between nations,
2. foster respect for international law and treaty obligations,
3. and to encourage settlements of international disputes by arbitration.

2. With reference to Manual Scavenging, consider the following statements:

1. It is in contravention with fundamental rights in India.
2. The employment of people as manual scavengers is banned in India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A 1 only
B 2 only
C Both 1 and 2
D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Explanation

- Manual scavenging is defined as **“the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”**.

- The practice is **driven by caste, class and income divides**.
- Therefore, manual scavenging is in **contravention with Article 21** of the Constitution, which guarantees '**Right to Life**' and that too with **personnel dignity**. Hence, **statement 1 is correct**.
 - **Fundamental rights** in India are the rights guaranteed under **Part III (Articles 12-35) of the Constitution of India**.
- In 1993, India banned the employment of people as manual scavengers (**The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993**). Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.

3. Consider the following statements:

1. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India's strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific Region.
2. The India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) is a part of the SAGAR vision.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : B

Explanation

- **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** was launched in 2015. It is **India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.
 - Through SAGAR, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities.
 - The key relevance of SAGAR emerges when seen in conjunction with India's other policies impacting the maritime domain like Act East Policy, Project Sagarmala, Project Mausam, India as 'net security provider', focus on Blue Economy etc.
- The **36th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (India-Indonesia CORPAT)** between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy is being conducted.

- As part of Government of India's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region), the Indian Navy has been proactively engaging with countries in the Indian Ocean Region for coordinated patrols, cooperation in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance, passage exercises and bilateral/multilateral exercises. Hence, statement 2 is correct.

4. With reference to the Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, consider the following statements:

1. He was feudatory of the Mughals and Aurangazab conferred the title of Sawai to Jai Singh.
2. His lineage can be traced back to the Kucchwaha Rajput clan who came to power in the 12th century.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Explanation

- **Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II (1693-1744)** was a great warrior and astronomer. He came to power at the age of 11 on the death of his father **Maharaja Bishan Singh**.
- He was **feudatory of the Mughals and Aurangazab** conferred the title of Sawai to Jai Singh, meaning one and a quarter, a title that all of Jai Singh's descendants kept. Hence, **statement 1 is correct**.
- He was trained by the best teachers and scholars in **art, science, philosophy and military affairs**.
- Jai Singh's lineage can be traced back to the **Kucchwaha Rajput clan who came to power in the 12th century**. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.
- He built **Astronomy Observatories** at Delhi, Jaipur, Varanasi, Ujjain and Mathura known as the **Jantar Mantar**.
 - **Jaipur** gets its name from him. Recently it has been **declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

5. Which of the following statement(s) is/are incorrect with respect to Kendu leaf

1. It is one of the Minor Forest Produce and a nationalised product like bamboo and sal seed.
2. Odisha is largest producer of kendu leaf, followed by Maharashtra and Jharkhand.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : b

Kendu Leaf

- Kendu leaf is called the green gold of Odisha, It is a nationalised product like bamboo and sal seed.
- It is one of the most important non-wood forest products in Odisha.
- The leaves are used to wrap bidis, a popular smoke among the locals.
- The states producing bidi leaves in India comprises mainly Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- Odisha is the third-largest producer of kendu leaf, after Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- The Uniqueness of Odisha's Tendu (kendu) leaf is in processed form whereas the rest of the states in India produce in Phal Form.

6. Consider the following statements:

1. Zoonotic infections can be bacterial, viral, or parasitic.
2. Scrub Typhus, Brucellosis, Anthrax are all zoonotic diseases.

Which of the given statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation:

- Zoonosis is another name for zoonotic disease. This type of disease passes from an animal or insect to a human.
- Zoonotic infections can be bacterial, viral, or parasitic.
- Scrub Typhus, Brucellosis, Anthrax are all examples of zoonotic diseases.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Though ordinances making power of President is given under Article 123 of the Constitution, yet its frequent use goes against the spirit of constitution. Examine. (150 words)

Approach

- Give brief idea of ordinance making power of President, its need and limits of its use
- Discuss how its arbitrary use undermines constitution
- List the limits set by Supreme Court in its various judgements for its use.

2. What do you understand by Darknet? Examine the issues and security concerns associated with it. (250 words)

Approach

- Define Darknet and how it differs from other networks of internet.
- Mention the issues and concerns related to darknet.
- Give measures to effectively tackle the problem.