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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. 75% Quota for locals in private jobs : Jharkhand

The Jharkhand Assembly has passed a Bill, which provides 75% reservation for local people in the private sector up to 40,000 salary a month.

- Every employer shall register such employees receiving gross monthly salary as wages not more than 40,000 as the limit notified by the government from time to time on the designated portal within three months of the Act coming into force.
- Every employer shall fill up 75% of the total existing vacancies on the date of notification of this Act and subsequent thereto by local candidates with respect to such posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are not more than ₹40,000".
- The Bill provides for the local MLA to supervise the employment procedure and issue directions to the employer concerned as it may deem fit.

Other such states

- Once notified, Jharkhand will become the third State in the country, after Andhra Pradesh and Haryana, to pass such law.
- In 2019, Andhra Pradesh passed such law, while in June last, Haryana passed law, reserving 75% quota for the local people in private jobs with monthly salary less than 50,000.

Quota for Locals

Ans. Constitutional provision for Equal Treatment

- Article 16 of the Constitution guarantees equal treatment under the law in matters of public employment. It prohibits the state from discriminating on grounds of place of birth or residence.
- Article 16(2) states that "no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State".
- The provision is supplemented by the other clauses in the Constitution that guarantee equality.
- However, Article 16(3) of the Constitution provides an exception by saying that Parliament may make a law "prescribing" a requirement of residence for jobs in a particular state.
- This power vests solely in the Parliament, not state legislatures.

But are reservations not granted on other grounds such as caste?

- Equality enshrined in the Constitution is not mathematical equality and does not mean all citizens will be treated alike without any distinction.
- To this effect, the Constitution underlines two distinct aspects which together form the essence of equality law:
 1. Non-discrimination among equals, and
 2. Affirmative action to equalize the unequal

Supreme Court rulings on quota for locals

- The Supreme Court has ruled against reservation based on place of birth or residence.
- In 1984, ruling in *Dr Pradeep Jain v Union of India*, the issue of legislation for “sons of the soil” was discussed.
- The court expressed an opinion that such policies would be unconstitutional but did not expressly rule on it as the case was on different aspects of the right to equality.
- In a subsequent ruling in *Sunanda Reddy v State of Andhra Pradesh* (1995), the Supreme Court affirmed the observation in 1984 ruling to strike down a state government policy that gave 5% extra weightage to candidates.
- In 2002, the Supreme Court invalidated appointment of government teachers in Rajasthan in which the state selection board gave preference to “applicants belonging to the district or the rural areas of the district concerned”.
- In 2019, the Allahabad HC struck down a recruitment notification by the UP PSC which prescribed preference for women who are “original residents” of the UP alone.

2. 2+2 meet will be held by India and Australia

In News:

- India and Australia will hold the **inaugural 2+2 Ministerial meeting** during the upcoming visit of the Australian Foreign Minister and Minister of Defence to India.

India Australia relations background

Ties between India and Australia started right from the time when European settlement began in Australia. When New South Wales was founded as a penal colony, all trade with the colony was controlled by the British East India Company. Before the Commonwealth of Australia was formed in 1901, many migrant workers and labourers were taken from the Indian subcontinent to Australia.

Diplomatic Ties

India established a Trade Office in Sydney in 1941. After independence, in 1950, Robert Menzies became the first Australian Prime Minister to visit India. He had earlier supported India's admission into the Commonwealth as a republic.

In 2009, a 'Strategic Partnership' was established between the two countries and relations have significantly expanded since then. In 2013, A K Antony became the first-ever Indian Defence Minister to visit Australia. The current PM Narendra Modi visited Australia in November 2014, a few months after he was appointed the PM.

Growing people-to-people ties

- There are many citizens in Australia with Indian origins. Out of the country's 24 million people, about half a million are of Indian origin.
- The fastest-growing language in Australia is Punjabi.
- As of 2017, more than 60000 students from India are studying in Australia.
- More than 2 lakh Indians visit Australia every year.

India - Australia Economic Relations

As of the year 2016, the bilateral trade between the two nations is worth A\$21.9 billion. This has grown significantly since 2003 when the figure stood at A\$ 4.3 billion. India's export of goods to Australia in 2011-12 was A\$ 2.49 bn (US\$ 2.60 bn) and India's import of goods was A\$ 13.11 bn (US\$ 13.71 bn). India's export of services was A\$ 0.80 bn (US\$ 0.84 bn) and import of services was A\$ 1.9 bn. (A\$ 2.0 bn). India is Australia's largest export market for gold and chickpeas, the second-largest market for coal and copper ores and the third-largest market for lead and wool. Four products - coal, non-monetary gold, copper ores & concentrates and petroleum - accounted for over 80 per cent of India's imports from Australia, with coal and gold being the dominant imports in 2011-12. India is Australia's tenth largest trading partner and the fifth-largest export market.

Major Australian Imports to India

- Coal
- Services (chiefly education)
- Gold
- Copper ores and concentrates
- Vegetables for consumption by consumers

Major Indian exports to Australia

- Refined petroleum
- Services (such as outsourcing)
- Pearls

- Gems
- Jewellery
- Medicaments

Both countries have established a **Strategic Research Fund** for \$100 million.

Uranium Import

In 2017, Australia shipped its first supply of uranium to India, after a deal which was signed in 2014. This is significant and can go a long way towards strengthening the relationship between the two countries. This is the first instance in which Australia is supplying uranium to a country that has not signed the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). This is also significant for satisfying India's increasing energy requirements.

Details:

- The inaugural 2+2 discussions are to be a cornerstone of the **Australia-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, which is founded on a shared commitment to a **secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region**.
- The areas of discussion would include economic issues, cyber security, climate change, critical technology and supply chains. The discussion is also likely to include a **bilateral free trade agreement** between India and Australia.

3. Women entry into the NDA : Centre

The Centre gave the Supreme Court the "good news" that it had taken a decision to allow women entry into the National Defence Academy (NDA), so far a male bastion for recruitment into the Armed Forces.

National Defence Academy

- The NDA is the joint defence service training institute of the Indian Armed Forces, where cadets of the three services train together before they go on to respective service academy for further pre-commission training.
- It is located in Khadakwasla, Pune, Maharashtra.
- It is the first tri-service academy in the world.
- Applicants to the NDA are selected via a written exam conducted by the UPSC every year, followed by extensive interviews by the Services Selection Board.

Latest development?

- Recently, the Supreme Court upheld the right of serving Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers of the Navy to be granted Permanent Commission (PC) on a par with their male counterparts.

Women in Armed Forces: Importance

- The court ruled that women naval officers cannot be denied the right to equal opportunity and dignity entitled to under the Constitution on specious grounds such as physiology, motherhood and physical attributes.
- The battle for gender equality is about confronting the battles of the mind.
- History is replete with examples where women have been denied their just entitlements under law and the right to fair and equal treatment in the workplace.

Why males have ever dominated the armed forces?

- Militaries across the world help entrench hegemonic masculine notions of aggressiveness, strength and heterosexual prowess in and outside their barracks.
- The military training focuses on creating new bonds of brotherhood and camaraderie between them based on militarized masculinity.
- This temperament is considered in order to enable conscripts to survive the tough conditions of military life and to be able to kill without guilt.
- To create these new bonds, militaries construct a racial, sexual, gendered “other”, attributes of whom the soldier must routinely and emphatically reject.

Dimensions of the Issue

Gender is not a hindrance: As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one's gender is arbitrary. It is easy to recruit and deploy women who are in better shape than many men sent into combat.

Combat Readiness: Allowing a mixed-gender force keeps the military strong. The armed forces are severely troubled by falling retention and recruitment rates. This can be addressed by allowing women in the combat role.

Effectiveness: The blanket restriction for women limits the ability of commanders in theatre to pick the most capable person for the job.

Tradition: Training will be required to facilitate the integration of women into combat units. Cultures change over time and the masculine subculture can evolve too.

Cultural Differences & Demographics: Women are more effective in some circumstances than men. Allowing women to serve doubles the talent pool for delicate and sensitive jobs that require interpersonal skills, not every soldier has.

Hurdles for Women

Capabilities of women: Although women are equally capable, if not more capable than men, there might be situations that could affect the capabilities of women such as absence during pregnancy and catering to the responsibilities of motherhood, etc.

Adjusting with the masculine setup: To then simply add women to this existing patriarchal setup, without challenging the notions of masculinity, can hardly be seen as “gender advancement”.

Fear of sexual harassment: Sexual harassment faced by women military officers is a global phenomenon that remains largely unaddressed, and women often face retaliation when they do complain.

Gender progressiveness could be an illusion: Women’s inclusion is criticized as just another manoeuvre to camouflage women’s subjugation and service as women’s liberation.

Battle of ‘Acceptance’: Acceptance of women in the military has not been smooth in any country. Every army has to mould the attitude of its society at large and male soldiers in particular to enhance acceptability of women in the military.

Job Satisfaction: Most women feel that their competence is not given due recognition. Seniors tend to be over-indulgent without valuing their views. They are generally marginalised and not involved in any major decision-making.

Doubts about Role Definition: The profession of arms is all about violence and brutality. To kill another human is not moral but soldiers are trained to kill.

Physical and Physiological Issues: The natural physical differences in stature, strength, and body composition between the sexes make women more vulnerable to certain types of injuries and medical problems. The natural processes of menstruation and pregnancy make women particularly vulnerable in combat situations.

Comfort Level: Most women accepted the fact that their presence amongst males tends to make the environment ‘formal and stiff’. The mutual comfort level between men and women colleagues is often very low.

Way ahead

- Induction of women into armed forces should be on the basis of their abilities and not on the basis of their gender.
- The training for both women and men should be standardized to eliminate differentiation based on physical capabilities.
- The career aspects and opportunities for women need to be viewed holistically keeping the final aim in focus.

4. Afghanistan situation reviewed by India and Russia

Context

- Meeting between Russia's Security Council Secretary-General and India's National Security Adviser in Delhi.

Details:

- As part of the meeting, India and Russia conducted their first **detailed and extensive review of the situation in Afghanistan.**
- India and Russia have agreed to **coordinate their positions on the Afghanistan issue.**
 - The two sides have stressed the need to hold the Taliban to their promises of ensuring that they **won't allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven for terrorist organizations** and also take measures to curtail the increase in opium production and drug trafficking under the new Taliban regime.
 - India and Russia also agreed to undertake joint efforts aimed at creating conditions for launching **a peaceful settlement process in Afghanistan on the basis of an intra-Afghan dialogue.**

The talks followed a day after CIA Director flew into Delhi to meet India's National Security Advisor.

Importance:

- **On the Afghanistan issue, there continues to remain differences between India and Russia** with Russia's position more closely aligned with that of China.
 - Russia is among the few countries that continue to keep their embassies open in Afghanistan in contrast to India, which has evacuated all diplomatic personnel.
 - Russia has also hosted Taliban delegations on a number of occasions unlike India which has refrained from actively engaging with the Taliban regime.

That the Russian President directly reached out to the Indian Prime Minister indicates the **Russian interest in working with India bilaterally, and multilaterally** at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and at forums like BRICS, despite the differences on the Afghanistan issue.

- BRICS can be an important platform to **strengthen political security cooperation** in Afghanistan among its members especially between India on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

India could as well use this opportunity to engage with Russia as a **leverage to protect its interests in Afghanistan both in the short as well as long term.**

NSA level talks of BRICS:

- National Security Advisers (NSA) from the five BRICS countries met virtually to discuss developments in Afghanistan.
- The meeting reviewed the regional and global political and security scenario in the light of the current developments in Afghanistan, Iran, West Asia and the Gulf.
- The meeting also discussed **emerging threats to national security, such as cybersecurity and terrorism.**
 - The representatives present at the meeting adopted and recommended the **BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan.**
 - The BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan is aimed at strengthening result-oriented cooperation between BRICS countries in areas such as preventing and combating terrorism, radicalisation, financing of terrorism, misuse of internet by terrorists, curbing travel of terrorists, border control, protection of soft targets, information sharing, capacity building, international and regional cooperation.
 - The BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan is one of the **key deliverables during the upcoming BRICS leaders' summit, which India is chairing.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Cabinet approves incentive scheme for textile sector

In News:

- The Union Cabinet has cleared an outlay of Rs. 10,683 crore on a **production linked incentive scheme in the man-made fibre apparel, fabrics, and technical textiles sectors.**

Background:

- The textile industry plays a significant role in the Indian economy by providing direct employment to an estimated 35 million people, by contributing 4 per cent of GDP and accounting for 35 per cent of gross export earnings. The textile sector contributes 14 per cent of the value-addition in the manufacturing sector.

Importance:

Aid in new investment:

- The new scheme could help **draw new investment of more than Rs. 19,000 crore.**

Leverage multiplier effect of the textile sector to employment generation:

- The PLI scheme would provide a big boost to the textile sector.
- **The textile sector is an employment intensive sector** and the investment in the textile sector would have a multiplier effect on the Indian economy especially in job creation.
- The scheme could aid in the **creation of 7.5 lakh direct jobs.**

Align India's capacity with world textile market trends:

- **Two-thirds of India's textile exports now are cotton-based whereas 66-70% of world trade in textiles and apparel is MMF-based and technical textiles.**
- The PLI incentives aim to boost investment in new capacities in man-made fibre (MMF) apparel, MMF fabrics, and 10 segments or products of technical textiles.
- India's focus on the manufacture of textiles in the MMF sector is expected to help boost its ability to compete globally in the textiles market.

Targeting balanced development:

- Given that **priority would be given for investment in aspirational districts, tier-three, tier-four towns and rural areas**, the new scheme would promote balanced regional development.

6. MSP for Rabi Crops hiked by centre

The Centre has increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for various crops ahead of the upcoming rabi season harvest.

Minimum Support Price (MSP) system

- MSP is a form of market intervention by the Govt. of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices.
- MSP is price fixed by GoI to protect the producer – farmers – against excessive fall in price during bumper production years.

Who announces it?

- MSP is announced at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops on recommendations by Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and announced by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by the PM of India.

Why MSP?

- The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution.
- They are a guaranteed price for their produce from the Government.
- In case the market price for the commodity falls below the announced MSP due to bumper production and glut in the market, government agencies purchase the entire quantity offered by the farmers at the announced MSP.

Historical perspective

- Till the mid-1970s, Government announced two types of administered prices:
 1. Minimum Support Prices (MSP)
 2. Procurement Prices
- The MSPs served as the floor prices and were fixed by the Govt. in the nature of a long-term guarantee for investment decisions of producers, with the assurance that prices of their commodities would not be allowed to fall below the level fixed by the Government, even in the case of a bumper crop.

- Procurement prices were the prices of Kharif and rabi cereals at which the grain was to be domestically procured by public agencies (like the FCI) for release through PDS.
- It was announced soon after harvest began.
- Normally procurement price was lower than the open market price and higher than the MSP.

Crops Covered

1. Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane.
2. The mandated crops are 14 crops of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops and two other commercial crops.
3. The list of crops is as follows:
 - Cereals (7) – paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi
 - Pulses (5) – gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil
 - Oilseeds (8) – groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and nigerseed
 - Raw cotton
 - Raw jute
 - Copra
 - De-husked coconut
 - Sugarcane (Fair and remunerative price)
 - Virginia flu cured (VFC) tobacco

Exception for Sugar

- The pricing of sugarcane is governed by the statutory provisions of the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 issued under the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955.
- Prior to 2009-10 sugar season, the Central Government was fixing the Statutory Minimum Price (SMP) of sugarcane and farmers were entitled to share profits of a sugar mill on 50:50 basis.
- As this sharing of profits remained virtually unimplemented, the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 was amended in October 2009 and the concept of SMP was replaced by the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane.

7. Green hydrogen, a new ally for a zero carbon future

In News

The forthcoming 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow from November 1-12, 2021 is to re-examine the coordinated action plans to mitigate greenhouse gases and climate adaptation measures.

How Green hydrogen as a fuel can be a game changer?

- Hydrogen is **the most abundant element on the planet**, but rarely in its pure form which is how we need it.
- **High energy density:** It has an energy density almost three times that of diesel.
- **'Green hydrogen'**, the emerging novel concept, is a zero-carbon fuel made by electrolysis **using renewable power from wind and solar to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.**
- **Best solution to remain under 1.5° C:** The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts the additional power demand to be to the tune of 25%-30% by the year 2040.
- Thus, power generation by 'net-zero' emission will be the best solution to achieve the target of expert guidelines on global warming to remain under 1.5° C.
- **Untapped potential:** Presently, less than 0.1% or say ~75 million tons/year of hydrogen capable of generating ~284GW of power, is produced.

Challenges: Production and storage cost

- The challenge is to compress or liquefy the LH2 (liquid hydrogen); it needs to be kept at a stable minus 253° C.
- This leads to its **'prior to use exorbitant cost'**.
- The **'production cost'** of 'Green hydrogen' has been considered to be a prime obstacle.
- The production cost of this 'green source of energy' is expected to be around **\$1.5 per kilogram** (for nations having perpetual sunshine and vast unused land), by the year 2030; by adopting various conservative measures.

Experiments in India

- - The Indian Railways have announced the **country's first experiment of a hydrogen-fuel cell technology-based train** by retrofitting an existing diesel engine; this will run under Northern Railway on the 89 km stretch between Sonapat and Jind.
- The project will not only ensure diesel savings to the tune of several lakhs annually but will also prevent the emission of 0.72 kilo tons of particulate matter and 11.12-kilo tons of carbon per annum.

Way forward for India

- India is the world's **fourth-largest** energy-consuming country (behind China, the United States and the European Union), according to the IEA's forecast, and will overtake the European Union to become the world's third energy consumer by the year 2030.

- It is high time to catch up with the rest of the world by going in for clean energy, decarbonising the economy and adopting 'Green hydrogen' as an environment-friendly and safe fuel for the next generations.

Conclusion

In order to achieve the goal of an alternative source of energy, adopting a multi-faceted practical approach to utilise 'Green hydrogen' offers a ray of hope.

8. Fossil fuel-based vehicles to be phase out by 2030

In News : The Assam government has unveiled an electric vehicle (EV) policy for phasing out vehicles running on fossil fuels by 2030.

Key features of the scheme

- The mission entails converting all government vehicles and fleet of public buses to electric and deploying 2 lakh EVs within the next five years.
- The policy also offers a set of incentives for people to switch to EVs.
- These include 100% exemption on registration charges and road tax.
- Entrepreneurs setting up EV charging stations have been assured of 90% exemption of electricity duty.

About Electric Vehicles (EVs)

- An electric vehicle uses one or more electric motors or traction motors for propulsion.
- An electric vehicle may be powered through a self-contained battery, solar panels or an electric generator to convert fuel to electricity.

Why is there a need for EVs in India?

- **Climate change:** EV are less polluting in nature.
- **Rapid urbanization:** India is home to 14 out of 20 most polluted cities in the world. EVs will help in tackling this problem by reducing local concentrations of pollutants in cities.
- **Energy security:** EVs can reduce dependence on imported crude oil promoting India's energy security.
- **Employment:** Promotion of EVs will facilitate employment growth in a sun-rise sector.

What are the Government Initiatives?

- Government has set a target of electric vehicles making up 30 % of new sales of cars and two-wheelers by 2030 from less than 1% today.
- To build a sustainable EV ecosystem initiatives like – National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) and Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric vehicles in India (FAME India) have been launched by India.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Charting a New Trajectory in India-Sri Lanka Relations

In News : India and Sri Lanka have enjoyed a cordial and relatively stable relationship since their independence. In the post-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) era, the neighbours align over key security and economic objectives, which includes maintaining freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean region, combating the threat of terrorism, and working together towards a more prosperous South Asian neighbourhood. Yet the relationship is in need of a fresh impetus.

Over the years, Sri Lanka has drifted towards China for economic support and views her as a more reliable partner in enabling domestic economic development. This has generated concern in New Delhi over the state of the bilateral relationship between the two countries, which views Beijing's proximity to its neighbours as undermining India's influence in the island nation.

Why is India concerned?

- Sri Lanka's drift towards China as a more reliable partner in enabling domestic economic development
 - Sri Lankans continue to be suspicious about India's motives vis-a-vis the Tamil cause.
 - India's slow bureaucratic processes that delay approvals incite suspicions of India's commitment to Sri Lanka. Last year, the Indian government took five months to approve a loan moratorium sought by Colombo while Beijing approved an additional US \$500 million loan from its development bank in no time. China's quicker decision making, and its far larger assistance makes them a more attractive partner.
 - However, Sri Lanka has been forced into a debt trap, and has had to sell its strategic assets through debt-equity swaps leading to creation of zones where its own sovereignty has been negated. This is bad news for Sri Lanka and a lesson to accord higher priority to diversity and balance in its foreign policy and international relations.
- Killing of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy
- The cancellation of the East Container Terminal port contract to India
- The Sri Lankan government led by the Rajapaksa family are historically known to be closer to China than India.

- China is also set to commence the construction of a US \$13 billion city on Sri Lanka's seafront close to Colombo, according to a recent report in the Wall Street Journal.

India's Strengths: In education, healthcare, and tourism, India is a far stronger partner than China. Under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Scheme** and the **Colombo Plan**, Sri Lankan nationals can benefit from 400 slots for short- and medium-term training courses in a variety of technical and professional disciplines. Since 2017, students from the island nation can also appear for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and IIT JEE (Advanced) exams.

Therefore, despite the convergence of objectives and interests, there is an urgent need for India and Sri Lanka to carefully and deliberately reinvigorate their bilateral relationship.

The Way Forward

- India can build on the existing educational exchanges by establishing an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT in Sri Lanka's planned education zone). In the country's northeast, India can set up technical and English language training centres like the Sri Lanka-India Centre for English Language Training (SLICELT) in Kandy.
- In addition, India and Sri Lanka should look forward to extensive cooperation in pharmaceutical manufacturing, as announced in the joint statement issued during Jaishankar's visit earlier this year.
- In the technology sector, India could create job opportunities by expanding the presence of its information technology companies in Sri Lanka. These organisations can create thousands of direct and indirect jobs and boost the island nation's service economy. Aside from a special economic zone (SEZ) for pharmaceuticals, the two sides could also look into similar provisions for information technology and education, among other sectors.
- As Sri Lanka embarks on the arduous project of drafting a constitution, India can lend its own experience in managing minority rights and diverse populations. It can help Sri Lanka draft policies ensuring linguistic and cultural freedom, access to grievance redressal, and reservation in representative bodies.
- India and Sri Lanka must look for ways to boost people-to-people contacts. The island nation's greatest number of tourists come from India, but the scope of religious tourism is yet to be explored. Through Prime Minister Modi's US \$15 million grant for promotion of Buddhist ties with Sri Lanka announced last year, the two countries can look to create a **Buddhism knowledge and tourism corridor**.
- Finally, **the grandeur and prevalence of cricket** in both countries ought to be leveraged. Expanding the Indian Premiere League (IPL) to Sri Lanka in partnership with Lanka Premier League (LPL) will encourage people-to-people contact and boost tourism.

Cooperation in these sectors does not diminish concerns on issues where the two neighbours might not align: Tamil minority rights and China's importance in Sri

Lanka's economy. However, history, cultural closeness and the constraints of geography poise India and Sri Lanka as natural and permanent partners to tide over these issues and explore synergies in new avenues to further their respective economic and developmental aspirations jointly.

2. PMGDISHA campaign for 100 percent digital literacy in Digital Villages launched

Context : The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) drive for **100% Digital Literacy of all digital villages** has been launched under PMGDISHA scheme, a flagship Digital Literacy scheme of the Government for rural areas.

- Under the campaign, a three day certification drive for rural citizens especially women and disadvantaged communities will be conducted.
 - Post that, a certification drive for PMGDISHA scheme will be conducted in a similar manner.
 - Apart from this Common Service Center (CSC) also proposed to make all the Digital Villages 100 percent Digital Literate.
- PMGDISHA and CSCs have emerged as the enablers for digital literacy and they are important in realizing the vision of transforming lives of common people and to bridge the gap between government and citizens through digital technology.

About PMGDISHA Programme

- Envisages to make six crore persons in rural areas, across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching to around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every household where there is no digitally literate person.
- Digitally literate persons: Digitally literate persons would be able to operate computers/digital access devices (like tablets, smart phones, etc.), send and receive emails, browse internet, access Government Services, search for information, undertaking cashless transactions, etc. and hence use IT to actively participate in the process of nation building.

3. Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment Centres

The state government in Punjab is banking on Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment Centres (OOAT) to curb the drug menace in the state.

OOAT Centres

- The move to set up OOAT centres in Punjab began in October 2017.
- The centres administer de-addiction medicine, a combination of buprenorphine and naloxone, to the opioid-dependent people registering there.

- Administered in the form of a pill, the treatment is primarily for addicts of opioid drugs, including heroin, poppy husk and opium.
- There are such private and state-run centres in Punjab.

Why is the Punjab government planning?

- Punjab is planning to open OOAT linked extension centres and clinics in rural areas to broaden the outreach of this treatment.
- The idea is that patients get medicine nearer their place of residence.
- It will also reduce pressure on existing OOAT centres which cater to patients from far off places.

Administering medicine at OOAT Centres

The patients are broadly put into three categories or phases.

- In the induction phase, the newly-registered patients are administered medicine at the OOAT centres for a week or two to manage withdrawal symptoms in the presence of the doctor and counsellor.
- In second, stabilization, phase, which extends between two to four months.
- The patient is put on watch for taking any opioid-based “super-imposed” illicit drug and accordingly maximum tolerated dose is administered to nullify the kick of the “super-imposed” drug.
- In the third, maintenance, phase, the patient is given take-home medicine and it continues for a year and half before assessment is done to see whether the medicine can be tapered off.

Why is Punjab banking so much on OOAT therapy?

There are two major approaches to wean away opioid-dependent persons.

- One is the abstinence approach and another alternate medication approach.
- There are more chances of relapse in abstinence-based approach as compared to alternate medication for de-addiction.
- In the abstinence approach, it would have taken years to rehabilitate patients by admitting them in facilities and there would have been increased chances of relapse.
- On the other hand, alternate medication approach has been acknowledged as better in various scientific studies worldwide.

4. Places in news: Qeqertaq Avannarleq Island



A group of researchers who went out to collect samples off the coast of Greenland in July found themselves on a tiny, uninhabited and previously unknown island.

Qeqertaq Avannarleq

- Measuring 60×30 metres and with a peak of three metres above sea level, it has now become the new northernmost piece of land on Earth.
- Before this, Oodaaq was marked as the Earth's northernmost terrain.
- The new island is made up of seabed mud and moraine, i.e. soil, rock and other material left behind by moving glaciers, and has no vegetation.
- The group has suggested the discovery be named 'Qeqertaq Avannarleq', which is Greenlandic for "the northernmost island".

How this island came to existence?

Ans. Undoubtedly, climate change in Greenland

- Global warming has had a severe effect on the ice sheet of Greenland.
- The new island, which was exposed by shifting pack ice, is, however, not a direct consequence of climate change.

5. FOSS4Gov Innovation Challenge

Context: A virtual roundtable discussion 'Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in Government' was organized by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to increase awareness about the usage of FOSS in governance and government functioning, and adoption of FOSS, MeitY.

- On the occasion of 7-year anniversary of MyGov, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) launched #FOSS4Gov Innovation Challenge to accelerate adoption of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in Government and build Indian FOSS Ecosystem
- Through this challenge, various innovators, start-ups, working professionals, academics and students in India are invited to showcase their existing FOSS based innovations and/or build new, implementable, open-source product innovations in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) with possible applications for Govtech in Health, Education, Agriculture, Urban Governance etc. The winners of the Challenge will receive cash rewards and incubation support to scale their products for listing on Government e Market (GeM).

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Semi-Conductor Shortage

In News : The global shortage of semiconductor chips has started making its effect felt in the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sector in India.

- As Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) slow down production, smaller players are being impacted as their business orders & hence the revenues drying up.

Reasons for Semiconductor Shortage

- Rise in Covid-19 cases in supplying countries, especially those in Asia, led to disruption of production (shutdown of factories) thereby causing the current shortage.
- An atrocious winter storm in Texas shutdown semiconductor factories, and a fire at a plant in Japan caused similar delays.
- Also, relatively low margins of Substrate manufacturing have led to its underinvestment and added to the pain of a global chip shortage
 - Substrates connect chips to the circuit boards that hold them in personal computers and other devices.
 - Made up of thin copper wire sandwiched in resin, substrates help transmit user instructions to a computer's chips and relay the answers.

- They are necessary because the ultrathin wiring that comes out of chips can't tolerate a direct soldered connection to a circuit board
- Substrate Manufacturing is therefore seen as a backwater of the global chip supply chain.
- Supplies of substrates is very tight and small disruption in this underinvested sector is causing big worries to chip manufacturers
- The chief executives of Intel and IBM have both said recently that the chip shortage could last two years.

Semiconductor chips and Automobile sector

- Semiconductor chips are integral parts of the power train, chassis, safety systems, advanced driver assistance systems, and other parts of automobiles.
- They are used more in passenger vehicles compared to commercial vehicles or two-wheelers
- The move to electric vehicles has led to increased demand of chips. For example, a Ford Focus typically uses roughly 300 chips, whereas one of Ford's new electric vehicles can have up to 3,000 chips
- With supply of semiconductor chips slowing down, the production in automobile sector is also adversely impacted.

Consequences of chip shortage on automobile sector:

- Due to longer lead time — the time between when the order is placed and the shipment is delivered — the automobile sector has been forced to cut down on its production.
- The slowing down of production by big automotive players has led to reduction in new orders being placed to MSME vendors (who supply parts)
- The MSMEs who are vendors and sub-vendors of the automobile industry are now working just 8 hours instead of the 12 hours they normally do. This has not only affected their earning but is also making them to migrate to other sectors.
- While the local MSME industrial sector was slowly coming back to normal after the second wave of Covid-19, the recovery has been hampered by the high price of raw material and low orders.

What is being done to address the situation?

- Firms like Samsung, Tata Group are sinking huge investments into semiconductor production
- The US, Europe and China have committed billions in subsidy to on-shoring production.
- Long-term supply contracts are being signed by automakers

How can India play its role?

- Since, chip fabrication is capital-intensive (an average sized facility costs \$7-10 billion) with long gestation and rapid technology, it is difficult for India to strive for self-sufficiency on chip fabrication.

- But, government-owned semi-conductor facilities already operated by ISRO and DRDO can be expanded and upgraded
- Government can attract global manufacturers by showcasing skilled talent pool in R&D, low labour costs, large market and policy support (Production-linked incentive scheme)

7. Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers

Activists have highlighted the plight of rivers as well as the support building up for according rights to them under the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers.

What constitutes the Rights of Rivers?

- Flow: If we look at a river as an ecosystem instead of cubic metres of water, then the ambit of rights gets broadened.
- Flora and fauna: It includes aquatic flora and fauna, the biodiversity in its catchment areas, forests, its tributaries, groundwater, the rocks and soil in its bed and banks.
- Human settlements: The rights of rivers in a sense would mean the ecological causes and conditions making up the natural habitat. Human settlements dependent is the prime factor.
- Economy: Such rights should not put an end to fishing or other localized, subsistence-based human needs related to the river, but rather push for a healthy relationship respecting the river as an ecosystem.

Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers

- The declaration is a civil society initiative to define the basic rights to which all rivers are entitled, according to a note by non-profit, International Rivers.
- This trend of granting rights to nature, taking place across the world, signals the beginnings of a radical shift from an extractive mindset to one where conservation safeguards are being extended to nature.
- The rights to recognize river as living entities rather than mere human property started in 2008.
- That year, Ecuador became the first country to constitutionally recognize the Rights of Nature.

Present campaigns

- In the one year since the declaration, rights have been recognised or declared for the Boulder Creek watershed in the US, the Magpie River in Canada, the Alpayacu river in Ecuador and the Paraná river and its wetlands in Argentina.

- Several campaigns calling for rights to be accorded to rivers have also incorporated the declaration.
- These include campaigns for the Lempa river in El Salvador, Tavignanu river in France, Ethiopie river in Nigeria, the Indus river in Pakistan and the Frome river in the UK.
- In 2017, a treaty agreement between the Whanganui Iwi (a Māori tribe) and the New Zealand government recognised the Whanganui River as a legal person.

Recognition of such rights in India

- In 2017, the Uttarakhand HC ruled that the Indian rivers Ganga and Yamuna, the Gangotri and Yamunotri glaciers, as well as other related natural elements are “legal persons” with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person.
- Subsequently, in 2018, the same high court ruled that the entire animal kingdom has rights equivalent to that of a living person.

Challenges

- Cultural practices: Activists and communities have been arguing for a need of cultural change that can bring about the ethic of care with regard to the rest of nature. Indigenous people have had such an ethic in their worldviews and ways of living.
- Development paradigm: The most critical challenge is whether can rights be protected without changing the current development paradigm. Any paradigm shift also needs questioning of fundamental forms of injustices, including capitalism, statism, anthropocentrism and patriarchy.
- Cross-boundary issues: Rivers don't necessarily follow human-made political boundaries. Indus, one of longest that runs through China, Pakistan, and India, doesn't flow as per political boundaries. Its contiguity demands a cross-boundary approach.
- Cooperation deficit: There is still very limited understanding across the world on how a law on the rights of rivers can be implemented. What would be the best ways to ensure custodianship, restitution, compensation.

8. Opioid Assisted Treatment in Punjab

The Chief Minister of Punjab has decided to launch a **100-day Big Bang programme** to check the problem of drugs in the state.

- The outreach of **Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT)** centres in rural areas would be enhanced by opening extension centres and clinics.

Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment Centres:

- OOAT centres administer **de-addiction medicine**, a **combination of buprenorphine and naloxone**, to the opioid dependent people registering there.
- It is administered in the **form of a pill** and treatment is primarily for addicts of opioid drugs, including heroin, poppy husk and opium.
- OOAT centres in Punjab were first set in **October 2017**.
 - There are currently **202 government-run OOAT** centres, including 11 in jails, where medicine is given free of cost.
 - In addition, there are 54 government and 224 **private de-addiction** and rehabilitation centres.
 - In all these centres, there are **over 7 lakh patients** registered for treatment at present.

OOAT linked extension centres in rural areas:

- The **state government** is set to open as many as **300 OOAT-linked extension centres/clinics** in rural areas to broaden the outreach of this treatment.
- It will also **reduce pressure** on existing OOAT centres and provide medicine to patients **nearer** to place of residence.

Govt. efforts in curbing drug abuse:

- **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1985:** Prohibits a person from producing, possessing, selling, purchasing, transporting, storing, and/or consuming any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance. The Act was amended thrice – in 1988, 2001 and 2014.
- **Narco-Coordination Centre:** Constituted in November 2016 and the scheme of **Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control** was revived.
- **Project Sunrise:** To tackle rising HIV prevalence in North-Eastern India, especially among people injecting drugs. Launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2016.
- **Seizure Information Management System:** Software to create a complete online database of drug offences and offenders, by Narcotics Control Bureau.
- **National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse:** To meet expenditure required for combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs, rehabilitation of addicts, and public education against drug abuse, etc.
- **National Drug Abuse Survey:** To measure trends of drug abuse in India through Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment with assistance from National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of AIIMS.
- **Nasha Mukta Bharat or Drug-Free India Campaign:** To focus on community outreach programs.

International Treaties and Conventions:

India has signed these International treaties and conventions to combat drug menace:

- UN Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)
- UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)
- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)
- UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000)

Prelims Practice Questions**1. Consider the following statements with respect to 13th BRICS Summit**

1. The event will be held under the Chairmanship of Russia.
2. The theme for the event is “BRICS@15: Intra-BRICS cooperation for continuity, consolidation and consensus”.
3. India hosted the BRICS Summit in 2012 and 2016.

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

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

Answer : c

13th BRICS Summit

- As part of India's ongoing Chairship of BRICS in 2021, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will chair the 13th BRICS Summit on 9 September 2021 in virtual format.
- The theme for the event will be 'BRICS @ 15: Intra-BRICS cooperation for continuity, consolidation and consensus'.
- This is the third time that India will be hosting the BRICS Summit after 2012 and 2016.
- The 2020 BRICS summit was held virtually amid the covid pandemic under the chairmanship of Russia.

BRICS Background

- The leaders of BRIC countries met for the first time at St Petersburg, Russia, on the margins of the G8 Outreach Summit in July 2006.
- Shortly afterwards, in September 2006, the group was formalised as BRIC during the 1st BRIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which met on the sidelines of the General Debate of the UN Assembly in New York City.
- After a series of high-level meetings, the 1st BRIC summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia on 16 June 2009.

2. Which of the following are the applications of Turmeric?

1. Food colouring agent
2. Flavouring agent
3. Dyeing agent
4. Traditional medicine

Select the correct answer from the code given below:

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 1, 2 and 4 only
- c. 2, 3 and 4 only
- d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Turmeric has a warm, bitter taste and is frequently used to flavour or colour curry powders, mustards, butters, and cheeses.
- Turmeric provides a natural dye to colour cloth, leather, silk, palm fibre, wool and cotton.
- Because curcumin and other chemicals in turmeric might decrease swelling, it is often used to treat conditions that involve pain and inflammation. Turmeric is used as a herbal medicine for rheumatoid arthritis, chronic anterior uveitis, conjunctivitis, skin cancer, small pox, chicken pox, wound healing, urinary tract infections, and liver ailments.

3. Blood Honey, sometimes seen in the news recently, refers to?

- a. Honey collected by traditional honey gatherers of Sunderbans
- b. Artificial production of Indian Royal Jelly outside its natural habitat

- c. A unique variety of honey in Thailand obtained from the blood of bees instead of its salivas
- d. Highly profitable honey obtained through exploitation of traditional honey gathering tribes in Africa

Answer : a

Blood Honey

- Sunderbans being the home to the Royal Bengal tigers, every year people die venturing into the forests to collect this honey.
- Due to the risks involved in its collection, it is called blood honey.
- It is also called Sundarban honey, as it is collected by the Sunderbans' Moulis community.
- This comparatively less thick honey has high demand for its nutritional value and purity.
- As this honey is multi-floral and there is practically no use of antibiotics or pesticides in Sundarbans.
- It is nearly twice as expensive as the branded honey.
- **Reasons for the high cost** - One major part of the cost input is going deep into the forest area. This means that there are also no pesticides or chemicals or any other impurities in this honey.
- Additionally, the purpose of ventures like this is the financial upkeep of this community too.

4. Which constitutional provision provides for reservation of seats in Panchayats?

- a. Article 15
- b. Article 239A
- c. Article 243D
- d. Article 280

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Article 243D of the Indian Constitution deals with the reservation of seats in Panchayats.
- It lays down provisions for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women.

5. Consider the following statements about Hycean Worlds

1. They are new class of exoplanets which are 2.6 times larger than Earth.

2. It has water rich interiors and hydrogen rich atmospheres.

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

Hycean Worlds

- The word “Hycean” represents the combination of Hydrogen and Ocean.
- They are new class of exoplanets with densities between those of rocky super-Earths and larger mini-Neptunes
- They are composed of water-rich interiors with massive oceans underlying hydrogen-rich atmospheres.
- These planets can be up to 2.6 times larger than Earth and have atmospheric temperatures up to nearly 200 degrees Celsius.
- Their oceanic conditions could be similar to those conducive for microbial life in Earth’s oceans.
- However, size alone is not enough to confirm whether a planet is Hycean. Other aspects such as mass, temperature and atmospheric properties are required for confirmation.

6. The term ‘Base Erosion and Profit Shifting’ is sometimes seen in the news in the context of

- a. mining operation by multinational companies in resource-rich but backward areas
- b. curbing of tax evasion by multinational companies
- c. exploitation of genetic resources of a country by multinational companies
- d. lack of consideration of environmental costs in the planning and implementation of developmental projects

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) refers to tax planning strategies used by multinational enterprises that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to avoid paying tax.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Climate change, overexploitation, and policy measures have combinedly turned India into a water-stressed economy. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing about the condition of water scarcity in India.
- Discuss the reasons for water stress in India.
- Suggest some measures to address the problem of water scarcity.
- Conclude Suitably.

2. Hydrogen is being dubbed as the alternative fuel. However, there are many problems associated with the leveraging of hydrogen technology. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing the context of using hydrogen as an alternate fuel.
- Discuss the pros and cons of hydrogen as a source of energy.
- Conclude suitably.