

[www.vishnuias.com](http://www.vishnuias.com)



# SEPTEMBER

## 30.09.2021

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

A MAGAZINE FOR CIVIL SERVICES PREPARATION

JOIN OUR TELEGRAM: <https://t.me/vishnuiasmentor>

Articles of the day  
**THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**

**UPSC**

General Studies

Test Series

Online &  
Offline  
classes

One-Stop  
Solution

Free daily  
materials

## **GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations**

### **1. 24 lakh pre-primary students to get meals**

#### **In News:**

The Cabinet has approved a proposal to rename the 26-year-old national mid-day meal scheme as the PM POSHAN (Poshan Shakti Nirman) scheme.

#### **Details:**

- The scheme aims to give a hot cooked meal to 11.8 crore government school students from Classes I to VIII.
- From FY 2022-23 it will also cover the 24 lakh children studying in balvatikas, the pre-primary section of government schools.
  - The balvatikas offer one year of pre-school classes.

The PM POSHAN scheme has been approved for the next five-year period until 2025-26, with a collective outlay of 1.31 lakh crore, including ₹31,733 crore as the share to be borne by the State governments.

It has been rebranded to provide a new shape to the policy “to enhance the nutrition levels of schoolchildren”.

It is expected to improve nutritional status, encourage education and learning and increase enrolments in government schools.

The extension of mid-day meals to pre-primary students, who are to be incorporated into the formal education system, was a key recommendation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.

However, there has been no progress on the NEP’s other recommendation to start offering breakfasts to school students.

### **2. Contentious Clauses in Data Protection Bill**

The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Data Protection has found a middle ground on certain contentious clauses. Many panellists had objected to the clause, saying that it made the entire Act infructuous.

#### **What is the issue?**

- The Data Protection Law has some clauses in the name of “sovereignty”, “friendly relations with foreign states” and “security of the state”.
- These clauses allow any agency under the Union government exemption from all or any provisions of the law.

- The legislation gives powers to the Central government to suspend all or any of the provisions of the Act for government agencies.

### **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019**

- The PDP Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology in 2019.
- The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals, and establishes a Data Protection Authority for the same.

Here are the key features:

#### **Applicability**

- The Bill governs the processing of personal data by: (i) **government**, (ii) **companies incorporated in India** and (iii) **foreign companies dealing with personal data** of individuals in India.
- Personal data is data which pertains to characteristics, traits or attributes of identity, which can be used to identify an individual.
- The Bill categorises certain personal data as sensitive personal data.
- This includes financial data, biometric data, caste, religious or political beliefs, or any other category of data specified by the government, in consultation with the Authority and the concerned sectoral regulator.

#### **Data fiduciary and his obligations**

- A data fiduciary is an entity or individual who decides the means and purpose of processing personal data. Such processing will be subject to certain purpose, collection and storage limitations.
- For instance, personal data can be processed only for specific, clear and lawful purpose.
- Additionally, all data fiduciaries must undertake certain transparency and accountability measures such as: (i) implementing security safeguards (such as data encryption and preventing misuse of data), and (ii) instituting grievance redressal mechanisms to address complaints of individuals.
- They must also institute mechanisms for age verification and parental consent when processing sensitive personal data of children.

#### **Rights of the individual**

The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual (or data principal). These include the right to:

1. Obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether their personal data has been processed

2. Seek correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data
3. Have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances and
4. Restrict continuing disclosure of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn

### **Grounds for processing personal data**

- The Bill allows the processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, personal data can be processed without consent.
- These include: (i) if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual, (ii) legal proceedings, (iii) to respond to a medical emergency.

### **Social media intermediaries**

- The Bill defines these to include intermediaries which enable online interaction between users and allow for sharing of information.
- All such intermediaries which have users above a notified threshold, and whose actions can impact electoral democracy or public order, have certain obligations, which include providing a voluntary user verification mechanism for users in India.

### **Data Protection Authority**

- The Bill sets up a Data Protection Authority which may: (i) take steps to protect interests of individuals, (ii) prevent misuse of personal data, and (iii) ensure compliance with the Bill.
- It will consist of a chairperson and six members, with at least 10 years' expertise in the field of data protection and information technology.
- Orders of the Authority can be appealed to an Appellate Tribunal. Appeals from the Tribunal will go to the Supreme Court.

### **Transfer of data outside India**

- Sensitive personal data may be transferred outside India for processing if explicitly consented to by the individual, and subject to certain additional conditions.
- However, such sensitive personal data should continue to be stored in India.
- Certain personal data notified as critical personal data by the government can only be processed in India.

### **Exemptions:**

The central government can exempt any of its agencies from the provisions of the Act:

1. In interest of security of state, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India and friendly relations with foreign states
  2. For preventing incitement to commission of any cognisable offence (i.e. arrest without warrant) relating to the above matters
- Processing of personal data is also exempted from provisions of the Bill for certain other purposes such as: (i) prevention, investigation, or prosecution of any offence, or (ii) personal, domestic, or (iii) journalistic purposes.
  - However, such processing must be for a specific, clear and lawful purpose, with certain security safeguards.

### **Sharing of non-personal data with government:**

The central government may direct data fiduciaries to provide it with any:

1. Non-personal data and
2. Anonymised personal data for better targeting of services.

### **Amendments to other laws**

- The Bill amends the Information Technology Act, 2000 to delete the provisions related to compensation payable by companies for failure to protect personal data.

## **3. PM Poshan Shakti Nirman Scheme**

The existing Mid-Day Meal scheme, which provides hot meals to students, has been renamed as the National Scheme for PM Poshan Shakti Nirman.

### **Propositions in the PM POSHAN Scheme**

- **Supplementary nutrition:** The new scheme has a provision for supplementary nutrition for children in aspirational districts and those with high prevalence of anaemia.
- **States to decide diet:** It essentially does away with the restriction on the part of the Centre to provide funds only for wheat, rice, pulses and vegetables. Currently, if a state decides to add any component like milk or eggs to the menu, the Centre does not bear the additional cost. Now that restriction has been lifted.
- **Nutri-gardens:** They will be developed in schools to give children “firsthand experience with nature and gardening”.
- **Women and FPOs:** To promote vocal for local, women self-help groups and farmer producer organisations will be encouraged to provide a fillip to locally grown traditional food items.
- **Social Audit:** The scheme also plans “inspection” by students of colleges and universities for ground-level execution.

- **Tithi-Bhojan:** Communities would also be encouraged to provide the children food at festivals etc, while cooking festivals to encourage local cuisines are also envisaged.
- **DBTs to school:** In other procedural changes meant to promote transparency and reduce leakages, States will be asked to do direct benefit cash transfers of cooking costs to individual school accounts, and honorarium amounts to the bank accounts of cooks and helpers.
- **Holistic nutrition:** The rebranded scheme aims to focus on “holistic nutrition” goals. Use of locally grown traditional foods will be encouraged, along with school nutrition gardens.

### **About the Mid-Day Meal Scheme**

- The Midday Meal Scheme is a school meal program designed to better the nutritional standing of school-age children nationwide.
- It was launched in the year 1995.
- It supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary classes in:
  1. Government, government aided, local body schools
  2. Education Guarantee Scheme, and alternate innovative education centres,
  3. Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and
  4. National Child Labour Project schools run by the ministry of labour
- The Scheme has a legal backing under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

### **Objective:**

To enhance the enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among school going children studying in Classes I to VIII

### **History of the scheme**

- In 1925, a Mid Day Meal Programme was introduced for disadvantaged children in Madras Municipal Corporation.
- By the mid-1980s three States viz. Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the UT of Pondicherry had universalized a same scheme with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage.
- In 2001, the Supreme Court asked all state governments to begin this programme in their schools within 6 months.

### Calorie approach

- Primary (1-5) and upper primary (6-8) schoolchildren are currently entitled to 100 grams and 150 grams of food grains per working day each.
- The calorific value of a mid-day meal at various stages has been fixed at a minimum:

Calories Intake	Primary	Upper Primary
Energy	450 calories	700 calories
Protein	12 grams	20 grams

### Impact created by the Scheme

- The MDM Scheme has many potential benefits: attracting children from disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis) to school, improving regularity, nutritional benefits, socialisation benefits and benefits to women are some that have been highlighted.
- Apart from nutrition, this scheme has been miraculous. Mothers who first used to interrupt their work to feed their children at home, now no longer need to do so.

### Issues with the Scheme

- **Discrimination:** Caste-based discrimination continues to occur in the serving of food, though the government seems unwilling to acknowledge this.
- **Leakages:** The scheme has been subjected to leakages similar to the Public Distribution System.
- **Unhealthy and unhygienic:** There have been cases of eating pesticide-contaminated mid-day meals leading to food poisoning.

### 4. PM-CARES: A fund without a care for the RTI

We all know that the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund doesn't come under the ambit of Right to Information (RTI). This oped seeks to discuss certain aspects of this issue.



### **Present context**

- In a recent affidavit, the Delhi High Court was informed that the PM CARES Fund is not a Government of India fund and that the amount collected by it does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India is strange.
- This petition is seeking the PM-CARES fund to be declared as the “State” under Article 12 of the Constitution.

### **Intriguing facts about PM-CARES fund**

- PM CARES has been created not by law, not by notification, but by the mere creation of a webpage, and set up last year in March to raise funds for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The page lists its structure, functions and duties in an arbitrary manner. The official appeals for funds are made under the national emblem.
- The most significant lie of this sworn statement is that the Government has no control over the Fund.

### **What is the case?**

- The PM-CARES Fund was not subject to CAG audit since the Supreme Court regarded it as a public charitable trust.
- It is not under public scrutiny. Also contributions to it were 100% tax-free.
- It is accused that there was statutory fund already in existence under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to receive contributions to finance the fight against a calamity.

### **What is RTI?**

- RTI is an act of the parliament which sets out the rules and procedures regarding citizens’ right to information.
- It replaced the former Freedom of Information Act, 2002.
- Under the provisions of RTI Act, any citizen of India may request information from a “public authority” (a body of Government or “instrumentality of State”) which is required to reply expeditiously or within 30.
- In case of the matter involving a petitioner’s life and liberty, the information has to be provided within 48 hours.

### **About PM CARES Fund**

- The PM CARES Fund was created on 28 March 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
- The fund will be used for combat, containment and relief efforts against the coronavirus outbreak and similar pandemic like situations in the future.



- The PM is the chairman of the trust. Members will include the defence, home and finance ministers.
- The fund will also enable micro-donations. The minimum donation accepted is ₹10 (14¢ US).

### **The other funds**

#### **(1) National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)**

- The statutorily constituted NDRF was established under the Disaster Management (DM) Act of 2005.
- The NDRF is mandated to be accountable, and answerable under the RTI Act, being a public authority, and auditable by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

#### **(2) Disaster Response Fund**

- The DM Act also provided for a Disaster Response Fund – state and district level funds (besides the national level).
- It also collects and uses the donations at the local level, with mandatory transparency and audit provisions.

#### **(3) Prime Minister's National Relief Fund**

- There is the PMNRF operative since the days of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was established with public contributions to assist displaced persons from Pakistan.
- The resources are now utilised primarily to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities and to the victims of the major accidents and riots.
- However, it has the President of India and the Leader of Opposition also as trustees.

### **Issues over PM-CARES Fund**

- **No defined purpose:** It is deliberately ignored while a new, controversial, unanswerable, and 'non-accountable vehicle is created; its character is not spelt out till today.
- **Non-accountable:** The government seems to consider statutory provisions for enquiry and information seeking to be embarrassing obstacles.
- **Centralization of donations:** It centralises the collection of donations and its utility, which is not only against the federal character but also practically inconvenient. The issue is seeming, the trusteeship of the fund.

### **Questions and gaps**

- **Law/statute:** The PM CARES Fund was neither created by the Constitution of India nor by any statute.

- **Authority:** If that is the case, under what authority does it use the designation of the Prime Minister, designated symbols of the nation, the tricolour and the official (gov.in) website of the PMO, and grant tax concessions through an ordinance.
- **Collection and dispensation:** The amount received by the Fund does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India. If it goes to the CFI, it could have been audited by the CAG.
- **Uncontrolled:** The This Trust is neither intended to be or is in fact owned, controlled or substantially financed by any instrumentality of the any govt even being chaired by the PM.

### **Issue over tax benefits**

- **Income tax:** An ordinance was promulgated to amend Income Tax Act, 1961 and declare that the donations to the PM CARES Fund “would qualify for 80G benefits for 100% exemption”.
- **CSR Funds:** It will also qualify to be counted as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure under the Companies Act, 2013.
- **Foreign donations:** It has also got exemption under the FCRA [Foreign Contribution Regulation Act] and a separate account for receiving foreign donations has been opened.

### **What can be inferred from all these?**

- The Centre now considers it as another obstacle and has created a new trust with the Prime Minister and his Ministers only.
- The manner in which the PM CARES Fund was set up – with its acronym created to publicise the point that the PM cares for people – shows a bypassing of the statutory obligations of a public authority.

### **Query and response: Again ironical**

- After initial denials, the Government has conceded it to be a public charitable trust, but still maintains that it is not a ‘public authority’.
- The point is that the PMO operates the Fund, but says it cannot supply any information about the PM CARES Fund because it is not a public authority.

### **Severe interpretations: Is it an Office of Profit?**

- If the PM CARES Fund is unconnected with the Government, then the Fund could become an office of profit.
- And that could disqualify him and the three Ministers from holding those constitutional offices.

## Conclusion

- In order to uphold transparency, the PM CARES Fund should be declared as a Public Authority under the RTI Act, and all RTI queries answered truthfully.
- The fund should be designated as a “public authority” under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act.

## 5. H-1B Visa

The need for H-1B visas will continue to exist till the ‘talent challenge’ is tackled globally, even though the information technology industry has successfully adopted the work-from-home model amid pandemic-related travel restrictions.

### Various US Visa Programs

#### 1) H-1B visa

**What is it:** The H-1B visa category covers individuals who “work in a speciality occupation, engage in cooperative research and development projects administered by the US Department of Defense or are fashion models that have national or international acclaim and recognition.”

**Who’s covered:** The H-1B is most well known as a visa for skilled tech workers, but other industries, like health care and the media, also use these visas.

#### 2) H-2B visa

**What it is:** According to USCIS, the H-2B program allows US employers or agents “to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary non-agricultural jobs.”

**Who’s covered:** They generally apply to seasonal workers in industries like landscaping, forestry, hospitality and construction.

#### 3) J-1 visa

**What it is:** The J-1 visa is an exchange visitor visa for individuals approved to participate in work-and-study-based exchange visitor programs in the United States.

**Who’s covered:** The impacted people include interns, trainees, teachers, camp counsellors, au pairs and participants in summer work travel programs.

#### 4) L-1 visa

**What it is:** The L1 Visa is reserved for managerial or executive professionals transferring to the US from within the same company, or a subsidiary of it. The L1 Visa can also be used for a foreign company opening up US operations.

**Who's covered:** Within the L1 Visa, there are two subsidiary types of visas

- L1A visa for managers and executives.
- L1B visa for those with specialized knowledge.

## **GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**

### **6. A lesson from China on gig workers' rights**

#### **Context:**

Recently, the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers, on behalf of gig workers, filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court demanding that the Union government provide aid to workers affected by the pandemic.

- Gig workers are those engaged in hourly or part-time jobs in everything from catering events to software development.
- They have a non-standard work arrangement with their employers and share a non-traditional employer-employee relationship.
- The work is usually temporary and completed within a stipulated time.

#### **Details:**

- The petition has asked for 'gig workers' and 'platform workers' to be declared as 'unorganised workers'.
  - Doing so would help them come under the purview of the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008.
  - In short, the petition demands social security benefits for gig workers.

The pandemic has helped make the services of delivery workers evident and visible. The media aided this transformation.

- Through 2020, China, India, the U.S. and Europe saw these invisible workers being propelled to frontline workers.

#### **Recent Development in China:**

- In early 2021, in successive strikes spanning over two months, delivery workers protested against poor working conditions.
- A weak civil society and the absence of independent labour unions leaves gig workers in China with very little option but to go on strike or protest, despite the risks, to affect change.
- China, owing to public pressure committed to ending the practice of forcing workers to register as independent businesses, which has helped food delivery platforms evade responsibilities as employers.
- Many of the government initiatives have lately been public-driven.

- In China, where the government is now focused on common prosperity, which seeks to narrow a widening wealth gap that threatens the country's economic rise, the government's scrutiny over food delivery platforms has also increased.
- It was in the government's interest to intervene when it realised that there was growing discontent not only among the delivery workers but also the public about their plight.

### **The Indian context:**

- The situation is different in India. Any reform in this sector is led wholly by delivery workers, not the public.
- For 27 days in 2020, close to 3,000 delivery workers from Swiggy went on strike in Hyderabad to protest the slash in remuneration.
- The strikes disbanded after the Joint Commissioner of the Labour Department called a hearing with the platform's operations manager and the workers' union.
  - It was the first time in India that such a negotiation was taking place.

In the lead up to Zomato's IPO in 2021, several Tweets called customers' attention to exploitative practices employed by platforms.

The PIL in the Supreme Court is another major step in this regard.

### **Conclusion:**

- The biggest lesson from China is that public opinion has partly led to government regulation and change in company policy.
- To combat disparities caused by their status as independent contractors and mistreatment by app companies, food app delivery workers in New York City have been fighting for better working conditions.
  - The New York City Council finally passed a bill package that recognizes the rights of these essential workers.

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic began, food delivery has become an essential part of daily life. Indians could also make an effort to be better informed about the way platforms work by seeking out delivery workers and asking about their work conditions and the pressures they face.

## **7. Cabinet approves ECGC listing, 6,000 crore for export cover**

- The Cabinet has approved an infusion of more than 6,000 crore into entities providing export insurance cover to facilitate additional exports worth in excess of 5.6 lakh crore over the next five years.
- The Cabinet has decided to give the ECGC 4,400 crore as capital, which will enable it to provide insurance policies worth 88,000 crore.

- It also approved the listing of state-run Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) on the stock exchanges.

**Significance:**

- Apart from spurring exports, these decisions will also create close to 62 lakh more jobs.

**Note:**

- ECGC Limited is a wholly-owned Central Public Sector Enterprise of the government of India.
- It provides insurance covers to banks against risks in export credit lending to the exporter borrowers.
- It was set up with the objective of improving the competitiveness of the exports by providing credit risk insurance and related services for exports.

## 8. Army to get 25 advanced light helicopters at 3,850 crore

**In News:**

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has accorded approval to capital acquisition proposals of the three Services.

**Details:**

- The capital acquisition proposals have been estimated at approximately 13,165 crore.
- Of these, procurements for ₹11,486 crore were from domestic sources.
- The key proposals include helicopters, guided munitions and rocket ammunition.
- The DAC accorded acceptance of necessity (AoN) for procurement of 25 advanced light helicopters (ALH)-Mark III helicopters from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) under Buy Indian-IDDMM (Indian Designed, Developed and Manufactured).
  - The ALH Mk III is fitted with a state-of-the-art glass cockpit and a powerful Shakti engine.

To give a boost to the indigenous design and development of ammunition, the DAC approved the procurement of terminally guided munition (TGM) and rocket ammunition under the buy (Indian-IDDMM) category.

The DAC also approved a few amendments to the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020, as part of business process re-engineering to ensure further ease of doing business for the industry as well as measures to enhance procurement efficiency and reduce the timelines, the statement added.



## 9. Probe shows use of toxic material in firecrackers: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has said a preliminary enquiry by the CBI into the firecracker industry, including in Tamil Nadu, revealed rampant violation of its ban on use of toxic ingredients like Barium and its salts.

### Air Pollution created by firecrackers

- Firing crackers increase the concentration of dust and pollutants in the air.
- After firing, the fine dust particles get settled on the surrounding surfaces which are packed with chemicals like copper, zinc, sodium, lead, magnesium, cadmium and pollutants like oxides of sulphur and nitrogen.
- These invisible yet harmful particles affect the environment and in turn, put our health at stake.

### Harmful elements used

- Copper: Irritates the respiratory tract.
- Cadmium: Leads to anemia by reducing the capacity of blood to carry oxygen.
- Zinc: Can cause metal fume fever and induces vomiting.
- Lead: Harms the nervous system.
- Magnesium: Metal fume fever is caused by Magnesium fumes.
- Sodium: It is a highly reactive element and caused burns when it is combined with moisture.

### Why is the issue in news now?

**Ans.** Barium content

- A chemical analysis of the samples of finished and semi-finished firecrackers and raw materials taken from the manufacturers showed Barium content.
- The court stated that loose quantities of Barium were purchased from the market.
- Also, firecracker covers did not show the manufacture or expiry dates.

### Issues with Barium

- Barium nitrate, which emits green flames when a cracker is lit, is a metal oxide that increases both air and noise pollution.
- There is no clarity on whether barium nitrate can actually be used or not.



### Alternatives: Green Crackers

- The new CSIR-NEERI formulation for green crackers has NO **barium nitrate** – one of the key ingredients of traditional firecrackers.
- These crackers have been named “safe water releaser (SWAS)”, “safe minimal aluminium (SAFAL)” and “safe thermite cracker (STAR)”.
- The three crackers release water vapour or air as a dust suppressant and diluent for gaseous emissions.
- These products can only be manufactured by those who have signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with CSIR-NEERI.
- The green crackers are sold with a unique logo on the box, and will also have a QR code with production and emission details.

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS

### GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

#### 1. National Action Plan for Rabies Elimination

The Government on **World Rabies Day** (September 28) launched the National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by **2030**.

#### Major Highlights:

- It has been drafted by the **National Centre for Disease Control** (NCDC) with the Ministry of Fisheries and Animal Husbandry.
- The scheme is based on 5 major pillars:
  - Political will, sustained funding, intersectoral planning, coordination, community planning, and operational research.
- **Aim:** To reduce human deaths due to dog-mediated rabies to zero by 2030 through mass dog vaccination and appropriate post-exposure treatment.
- Using the term ‘**Hadakwa**’ in popularizing the activities under the Plan. Rabies is popularly known as Hadakwa in rural India.

#### Vital Elements of the Scheme:

- **Prevention:** Introduction of cost-effective public health intervention techniques to improve, affordability, and availability.
- **Promotion:** Improve understanding of rabies through advocacy, awareness, education, and operational research.

- **Partnership:** Provide coordinated support for the anti-rabies drive with, urban and rural civil society, government, private sectors, and international partners.

### What is Rabies?

- Rabies is a viral **zoonotic disease** that causes progressive and fatal inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.
- It has two forms:
  - **Furious rabies:** characterized by hyperactivity and hallucinations.
  - **Paralytic rabies:** characterized by paralysis and coma.
- The preventable viral disease is **transmitted through** the bite or saliva of infected animals, like dog, monkey, bats etc.
- **Dog-mediated** human rabies can be eliminated by tackling the disease at its source.

### Symptoms:

- Early symptoms can include a **fever with pain**, unusual tingling, burning sensation at the wound site.
- The virus can spread to the **central nervous system**, causing fatal inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.
- The **incubation period** of the disease can vary from 1 week to 1 year.
- **Furious rabies** causes signs of hyperactivity, hydrophobia.
- In **Paralytic rabies**, muscles gradually become paralyzed, at the site of the bite. A coma slowly develops and eventually death occurs.

### Treatment:

- **Vaccinating dogs** is the most effective strategy for preventing rabies in people.
- Human rabies vaccines exist for pre-exposure immunization.
- If bitten wash the wound with soap or detergent.
- Apply an **iodine-containing** or anti-viral medication to the wound.
- Avoid covering the wound with dressings or **bandages**.
- Avoid applying **irritants** to the wounds like acids and alkalis.

## 2. Renewable Energy Certificate

The Ministry of Power has decided to make amendments in the Renewable Energy Certificate (REC).

### Major Highlights:

- The aim is to align the mechanism with the emerging changes in the power scenario and to promote **new renewable technologies**.
- It will provide flexibility to the players, additional avenues, rationalization and addressing the RECs validity period uncertainty issues.

### Features of Amendments in REC Mechanism:

- Validity of REC would be perpetual till it is sold.
- **Floor and forbearance prices** are not required to be specified.
- Central Electricity Regulatory Commission to have monitoring and the surveillance mechanism to ensure there is no hoarding of RECs.
- The **Renewable Energy** generator, will be eligible for issuance of RECs for the period of Power Purchase Agreement as per the prevailing guidelines.
- Technology multiplier will be introduced for promotion of new and high priced RE technologies.
- **No REC** to be issued to the beneficiary of subsidies.
- Allowing traders and bilateral transactions in REC mechanism.

### What is Renewable Energy Certificate?

- These are a **market-based instrument** that certifies the bearer owns one megawatt-hour of electricity generated from a renewable energy resource.
- Once the power provider has fed the energy into the grid, the REC received can then be sold on the open market as an energy commodity.

### Key Takeaways:

- They provide a proof that the owner of an energy market instrument owns one MWh of **renewable energy**.
- They can be sold for profit to **speculators** betting on the value of energy credits.
- REC swaps consist of trading RECs to profit from the disparity between the buy and sell price.

### 3. Poshan Shakti Nirman Scheme

The flagship Midday Meal Programme at government and aided schools has been **renamed** as PM Poshan Shakti Nirman Scheme.

### Highlights of the Scheme:

- The scheme will offer **hot cooked meals** to pre-primary classes and Balvatika centres.
- The scheme will benefit about 11.80 crore children studying in 11.20 lakh schools.
- Introduction of **Tithi Bhojan**, social audit, school nutrition gardens, and will boost learning, and nutrition outcomes.
- It will involve **Follow on Public Orders and women SHGs** in the implementation of the scheme.
- Development of nutrition gardens on school campuses. The gardens will provide additional micro-nutrients to students.
- **Cooking competitions** will be encouraged from village level to the national level to promote innovative menus based on locally available ingredients.
- **Special provision** is made for providing supplementary nutrition to children in districts with high prevalence of anaemia.

### Structural Changes in the Scheme:

- The **Centre and the states** will bear the cost of the scheme in 60:40 ratio, with the Centre taking care of the cost of grains.
- Students from **private schools** will be encouraged to share their meals with children from marginalised sections
- States will organise community programmes in which people provide special food to children.
- The ministry will engage **college and university students** to monitor the scheme at a local level.

### Tenure:

- The scheme will continue for next 5 years with a financial outlay of Rs 54,061.73 crores from the central government and Rs 31,733.17 crore from state governments.

**GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**

#### 4. Meningitis

The World Health Organization on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021, launched the first-ever strategy of Global Roadmap to Defeat Meningitis by 2030.

- The strategy was launched at a virtual event, by **WHO** in Geneva, Switzerland.

#### Major Highlights:

- **Aim:** To prevent infections and improve care and diagnosis for those affected.
- The strategy could save more than 200,000 lives annually and **reduce disability** caused by the disease.
- **Meningitis** causes around 250,000 deaths a year and can lead to fast-spreading epidemics.
- It kills a tenth of those infected mostly children and young people.
- It is most common in the '**Meningitis Belt**,' which spans 26 countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

#### Objectives of the Roadmap:

- Achievement of high immunisation coverage, development of new affordable vaccines.
- Improved prevention strategies and outbreak response.
- **Speedy diagnosis** and optimal treatment for patients
- Good data to guide prevention and control efforts
- **Advocacy and engagement**, to ensure high awareness of meningitis, accountability for national plans, care, and after-care services.

#### What is Meningitis?

- Meningitis is a serious infection of the **meninges**, the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord.
- It is a devastating disease and remains a major public health challenge.
- The disease can be caused by different **pathogens** including bacteria, fungi, or viruses, the highest global burden is seen with bacterial meningitis.
- It can affect anyone of any age, but mainly affects babies, children, and young people.

#### Transmission:

- The **bacteria** are transmitted from person-to-person through droplets of respiratory or throat secretions from carriers.
- The incubation period is 4 days but can range between 2 and 10 days.

- It can overwhelm the body's defenses allowing infection to spread through the bloodstream to the brain.

### Symptoms:

- The most common symptoms are a stiff neck, high fever, sensitivity to light, confusion, headaches, and vomiting.
- **Bacterial meningitis** may result in brain damage, hearing loss or a learning disability in 10% to 20% of survivors.

### Treatment:

- A range of antibiotics can treat the infection, including penicillin, ampicillin, and ceftriaxone.
- **A conjugate vaccine** has been rolled out in the meningitis belt of sub-Saharan Africa in 2010

### Key Facts:

Types of meningococcal vaccines:

- **Polysaccharide vaccines** used in outbreak response, in Africa.
- **Conjugate vaccines** used in prevention and outbreak response.
- **Protein based vaccine**, against N. meningitidis B. It is used in an outbreak response.
- Outside the Africa, **chemoprophylaxis** is recommended for close contacts.
- Ciprofloxacin is the antibiotic of choice, and ceftriaxone an alternative.

## 5. Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) Mechanism

Union Minister of Power and New & Renewable Energy has given his assent to amendments in the existing Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) mechanism.

### What are RECs?

- Renewable Energy Certificates (REC) is a policy instrument to catalyze the development of renewable energy.
- It is a market-based mechanism that will help the states meet their regulatory requirements (such as Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs)) by overcoming the geographical constraints on existing renewable potential in different states.



## REC Mechanism

- REC mechanism is a market-based instrument to promote renewable energy and facilitate compliance of renewable purchase obligations (RPO).
- It is aimed at addressing the mismatch between availability of RE resources in state and the requirement of the obligated entities to meet the RPO.
- 1 REC is treated as equivalent to 1 MWh.

### How many types of RECs are there?

There are two categories of RECs, viz., solar RECs and non-solar RECs.

1. Solar RECs are issued to eligible entities for generation of electricity based on solar as renewable energy source.
2. Non-solar RECs are issued to eligible entities for generation of electricity based on renewable energy sources other than solar.

### Sources of revenue under REC mechanism

- Revenue for a RE generator under REC scheme includes revenue from the sale of electricity component of RE generation and the revenue from the sale of environmental attributes in the form of RECs.

### What are the proposed changes?

The salient features of changes proposed in revamped REC mechanism are:

- Validity of REC would be perpetual i.e., till it is sold.
- Floor and forbearance prices are not required to be specified.
- The RE generator who are eligible for REC, will be eligible for issuance of RECs for the period of PPA as per the prevailing guidelines.
- The existing RE projects that are eligible for REC would continue to get RECs for 25 years.
- A technology multiplier can be introduced for promotion of new and high priced RE technologies, which can be allocated in various baskets specific to technologies depending on maturity.
- RECs can be issued to obligated entities (including DISCOMs and open access consumers) which purchase RE Power beyond their RPO compliance notified by the Central Government.
- No REC to be issued to the beneficiary of subsidies/concessions or waiver of any other charges.
- Allowing traders and bilateral transactions in REC mechanism.

## 6. Electoral Bonds Scheme

What is Electoral Bonds Scheme?



- As per the scheme, Electoral bonds means a bond issued in the nature of **promissory note** which is a **bearer banking instrument not carrying the name of buyer or payee**. They are used for making donations to political parties. Govt launched it on 2 Jan, 2018.
- They are **issued by Scheduled Commercial Banks** upon authorisation from **Central Govt (not RBI)** to donor, but **only against cheque and digital payments (not cash)**. They are redeemable in a **registered** political party.
- Amendments to RBI Act, 1934 and RPA, 1951 was made through Finance Bill, 2017.
- It is an **interest free** banking instrument issued on a **non refundable basis** and are **not available for trading**. Further, **no loan** would be provided against these bonds. Purchases needs to have fulfilled **KYC norms**.
- Electoral Bonds would have a **life of only 15 days** during which it can be used for making donation **only to the political parties registered under Section 29A of RPA, 1951**. It will be encashed by them only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.
- **No payment** shall be made to any payee political party **if the bond is deposited after the expiry** of the validity period and the bond deposited by any political party to its account shall be **credited on the same day**.
- The **information** furnished by the buyer shall be **treated confidential**. **No commission, brokerage or any charges** for the issue of bond shall be payable.
- **Maximum amount of cash donation** that a political party can receive is stipulated at Rs. **2000/- from 1 person**. Political parties are exempted from Income tax.
- As per **Section 29C (1)** of RPA, 1951, the political party needs to **disclose the details of Non governmental corporations and persons who donate > 20000** to it.
- **Issues:**
  1. **Donors are left anonymous**. So Electoral bonds cannot be identified or associated with any particular buyer or political party.
  2. Election Commission argues that it **does not allow to check violations of RPA**.
  3. Declaration of sources of funding for political parties is given in Section 29 of RPA, 1951. **Before 2017, they had to declare all donations made > 20000 but now they are out of this purview**.
  4. Electoral Bods are **exempt from Income Tax Act**.
  5. Issue of **corporate funding misuse** to Political parties and lobbying.
  6. Issue of **favoring the ruling party**. As in 2017-18, 94.6% of bonds given to BJP.
  7. **Foreign companies with a majority stake in Indian companies can invest in Electoral bonds**. This allows unchecked foreign funding.
- **Benefits**
  1. It limits the use of cash in political funding.

2. It curbs Black money as the payments are made only by Cash, DD, NEFT, RTGS.
  3. It protects donor from political victimization as they remain anonymous.
- **3 National Parties received 1931 crore** in FY 19 through Electoral Bond scheme which allows anonymous donations to political parties. **BJP got the highest.** Both EC and RBI are against it.

## 7. Antimalarial drug resistance in India

In recent years there is increasing evidence for the failure of artemisinin-based combination therapy for falciparum malaria either alone or with partner drugs.

### What is Malaria?

- Malaria is caused by the bite of the female Anopheles mosquito if the mosquito itself is infected with a malarial parasite.
- There are five kinds of malarial parasites – Plasmodium falciparum, Plasmodium vivax (the commonest ones), Plasmodium malariae, Plasmodium ovale and Plasmodium knowlesi.
- Therefore, to say that someone has contracted the Plasmodium ovale type of malaria means that the person has been infected by that particular parasite.

### Burden of Malaria in India

- In 2018, the National Vector-borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP) estimated that approximately 5 lakh people suffered from malaria.
- 63% of the cases were of Plasmodium falciparum.
- The recent World Malaria Report 2020 said cases in India dropped from about 20 million in 2000 to about 5.6 million in 2019.

### Treatment of Malaria

- Malaria is treated with prescription drugs to kill the parasite. Chloroquine is the preferred treatment for any parasite that is sensitive to the drug.
- In most malaria-endemic countries including India, Artemisinin-based antimalarial drugs are the first-line choice for malaria treatment.
- This is especially against Plasmodium falciparum parasite which is responsible for almost all malaria-related deaths in the world.

### Why in news now?

- There are reports of artemisinin resistance in East Africa and is a matter of great concern as this is the only drug that has saved several lives across the globe.
- In India, after the failure of chloroquine to treat *P. falciparum* malaria successfully, artemisinin-based combination therapy was initially introduced in 2008.
- Currently, several combinations of artemisinin derivatives are registered in India.

### Artemisinin-based combination therapy failure in India

- In 2019, a report from Eastern India indicated the presence of two mutations in *P. falciparum* cases treated with artemisinin that linked to its presence of resistance.
- Again in 2021, artemisinin-based combination therapy failure was reported from Central India where the partner drug SP showed triple mutations with artemisinin wild type.
- This means the failure of artemisinin-based combination therapy may not be solely linked to artemisinin. Here it is needed to change the partner drug as has been done in NE states in 2013.

### History of drug resistance

- In the 1950s chloroquine resistance came to light.
- Both chloroquine and pyrimethamine resistance originated from Southeast Asia following their migration to India and then on to Africa with disastrous consequences.
- Similarly, artemisinin resistance developed from the six Southeast Asian countries and migrated to other continents, as is reported in India and Africa.
- It would not be out of context that artemisinin is following the same path as has been seen with chloroquine.
- Now, the time has come to carry out Molecular Malaria Surveillance to find out the drug-resistant variants so that corrective measures can be undertaken in time to avert any consequences.
- Some experts even advocate using triple artemisinin-based combination therapies where the partner drug is less effective.

**Prelims Practice Questions**

**1. Consider the following statements with respect to Right to Information:**

1. Only an individual who is above 18 years of age is eligible to seek information.
2. The right to information has been recognized as a fundamental right.

**Which of the above statements is/are INCORRECT?**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- The right to information has been recognised as a fundamental right under Part III of the Constitution by the Supreme Court in several cases.
- The RTI Act, 2005, provided an extended regime for enabling effective implementation of the fundamental right to information.
- Any citizen can request information by making an application in writing or through electronic means together with the prescribed fees.

**2. Which of the following chemicals are barred from usage in firecrackers?**

1. Antimony
2. Lithium
3. Mercury
4. Arsenic
5. Lead

**Options:**

- a. 1, 3 and 4 only
- b. 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- c. 1 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

Antimony, Lithium, Mercury, Arsenic and Lead have been barred from usage in firecrackers by the Supreme Court in 2017. These chemicals are proven to be hazardous for respiratory systems and can cause serious ailments like asthma, lung cancer, shortness of breath, hormonal imbalances, and many other respiratory diseases.

**3. Which one of the following National Parks has a climate that varies from tropical to subtropical, temperate and arctic?**

- a. Khangchendzonga National Park
- b. Nandadevi National Park
- c. Neora Valley National Park
- d. Namdapha National Park

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Namdapha National Park has a climate that varies from tropical to subtropical, temperate and arctic.
- It is the largest protected area in the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot and is located in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Its habitat changes with increasing altitude from tropical moist forests to Montane forests, temperate forests and at the higher elevations, to Alpine meadows and perennial snow.

**4. Consider the following statements with respect to Rabies**

1. It is a zoonotic, viral disease spread to people from the saliva of infected animals.
2. It is one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases that predominantly affects poor and vulnerable populations of remote rural locations.

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 : c

### **National Action Plan for dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by 2030**

- National Action Plan for dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by 2030 (NAPRE) was launched recently.
- It wants to eliminate Dog mediated Rabies (Hadakwa disease) from India by 2030 through One Health Approach including community education, awareness programmes and vaccination campaigns.
- 33% of global rabies deaths are recorded in India.

### **Rabies**

- Rabies is a zoonotic, viral disease spread to people from the saliva of infected animals.
- Rabies is a 100% fatal but 100% vaccine preventable.
- Rabies is a Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) that mostly affects poor and vulnerable populations. 80% of cases occur in rural areas.
- **Spread** - Dogs are the main source of human rabies deaths, contributing up to 99% of all rabies transmissions to humans.
- It is also transmitted through bats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and skunks.
- In rare cases, rabies can be spread when infected saliva gets into an open wound or the mucous membranes, such as the mouth or eyes.
- **Prevention** - Interrupting transmission is feasible through vaccination of dogs and humans, and prevention of dog bites.
- WHO leads the 'United Against Rabies' to drive progress towards "Zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030".

### **5. Consider the following statements:**

1. The river rises on Brahmagiri Hill of the Western Ghats drains into Bay of Bengal.
2. Harangi, Hemavati and Shimsha are the tributaries of the river.

Which of the following Rivers are described in the statements given above?

- A Godavari
- B Cauvery
- C Amaravati
- D Kabini

Answer : B

Explanation

- **Cauvery** is known as '**Ponni**' in Tamil, also known as Ganga of the south, and it is the fourth largest river of southern India.
- It is a sacred river of southern India. It rises on **Brahmagiri Hill of the Western Ghats in southwestern Karnataka state**, flows in a southeasterly direction through the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and descends the Eastern Ghats in a series of great falls and **drains into Bay of Bengal** through Pondicherry.
- Some of its tributaries are:
  - Left: **Harangi, Hemavati, Shimsha**, Arkavathy
  - Right: Lakshmana Tirtha, Kabini, Bhavani, Noyyal, Amaravati, Moyar

**6. With reference to the Landsat 9, consider the following statements:**

1. It is an earth monitoring satellite launched by ISRO.
2. It will help study climate change.

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

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- NASA has launched **an earth monitoring satellite called Landsat 9** from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California. The satellite is a joint mission of **NASA and the US Geological Survey (USGS)**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.
  - Landsat-9 is the **continuation of a series of Earth-observing spacecraft stretching back almost 50 years**.
- Landsat images have been used to study the **health of forests, coral reefs, monitor water quality and melting glaciers**. This satellite is referred to as NASA's' **new eye in the sky**' that will help study climate change. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.



## **Mains Practice Questions**

**1Q. National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient education system in India. Critically examine the statement.**

### **Approach**

- Start the answer by briefly discussing the envisaged goal of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- Discuss the significance of NEP.
- Discuss the associated issues with NEP
- Conclude suitably.

**2Q. Examine the reasons for underrepresentation of women in Indian political system. Also suggest some remedial measures to close this gender gap in politics. (250 words)**

### **Approach**

- Give brief account of women participation in politics in India
- Give reasons for their underrepresentation and also highlight the socio-economic and cultural forces behind these factors.
- Suggest remedial measures
- Give Conclusion.