

www.vishnuias.com



NOVEMBER

08.11.2021

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. A new jurisprudence for political prisoners

In *Thwaha Fasal vs Union of India*, the Court has acted in its introspective jurisdiction and deconstructed the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) with a great sense of legal realism. This paves the way for a formidable judicial authority against blatant misuse of this law.

Background of the case

- In this case from Kerala, there are three accused.
- The police registered the case and later the investigation was handed over to the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**.
- During the investigation, some materials containing radical literature were found, which included a book on caste issues in India and a translation of the dissent notes written by Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin.
- Thus, the provisions of the UAPA were invoked.
- After initial rejection of the pleas, the trial judge granted bail to both the accused in September 2020.
- The Supreme Court was emphatic and liberal when it said that mere association with a terrorist organisation is not sufficient to attract the offences alleged.
- Unless and until the association and the support were “**with intention of furthering the activities of a terrorist organisation**”, offence under **Section 38 or Section 39** is not made out, said the Court.

Issues with UAPA

- **Section 43D(5)** of the UAPA says that for many of the offences under the Act, bail should not be granted, if “on perusal of the case diary or the report (of the investigation), there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation is prima facie true”.
- Thus, the Act prompts the Court to consider the version of the prosecution alone while deciding the question of bail.
- Unlike the Criminal Procedure Code, the UAPA, by virtue of the proviso to Section 43D(2), **permits keeping a person in prison for up to 180 days**, without even filing a charge sheet.

- **Prevents examination of the facts:** The statute prevents a **comprehensive examination of the facts** of the case on the one hand, and prolongs the trial indefinitely by keeping the accused in prison on the other.
- Instead of presumption of innocence, the UAPA holds **presumption of guilt of the accused**.
- In Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali, the Court said that by virtue of Section 43D(5) of UAPA, the burden is on the accused to show that the prosecution case is not prima facie true.
- The proposition in Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali is that the bail court should not even investigate deeply into the materials and evidence and should consider the bail plea, primarily based on the nature of allegations, for, according to the Court, **Section 43D(5)** prohibits a thorough and deeper examination.
- The top court has now altered this terrible legal landscape.

Key takeaways from the judgement

- The text of the laws sometimes poses **immense challenge to the courts** by limiting the space for judicial discretion and adjudication.
- The courts usually adopt two mutually contradictory methods in dealing with such tough provisions.
- One is to read and apply the provision literally and mechanically which has the effect of curtailing the individual freedom as intended by the makers of the law.
- In contrast to this approach, there could be **a constitutional reading of the statute**, which perceives the issues in a human rights angle and tries to mitigate the rigour of the content of the law.

Conclusion

The judgment should be invoked to release other political prisoners in the country who have been denied bail either due to the harshness of the law or due to the follies in understanding the law or both.

2. AUKUS could rock China's boat in the Indo-Pacific

The trilateral security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) continues to be in the news.

Implications for ASEAN

- There is also the matter of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) disunity over the emergence of AUKUS.

- While AUKUS is clearly an attempt by the U.S. to **bolster regional security**, including securing Australia's seaborne trade, any sudden accretion in Australia's naval capabilities is bound to cause unease in the region.
- Even though **Australia has denied that AUKUS is a defence alliance**, this hardly prevents China from exploiting ASEAN's concerns at having to face a Hobson's choice amidst worsening U.S.-China regional rivalry.
- AUKUS is based on a shared commitment of its three members to deepening diplomatic, security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
- Even though this has not been stated explicitly, the rise of China, particularly its **rapid militarisation and aggressive behaviour**, is undoubtedly the trigger.

Relations of AUKUS members with China

- The AUKUS joint statement clearly acknowledges that trilateral defence ties are decades old, and that AUKUS aims to further joint capabilities and interoperability.
- For three nations, their relations with China have recently been marked by contretemps.
- Australia, especially, had for years subordinated its strategic assessment of China to transactional commercial interests.
- Much to China's chagrin, its policy of deliberately targeting Australian exports has not yielded the desired results.
- Instead of kow-towing, the plucky Australian character has led Canberra to favour **a fundamental overhaul of its China policy**.
- The transfer of sensitive submarine technology by the U.S. to the U.K. is a sui generis arrangement based on their long-standing Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958.
- Elements in the broader agenda provide opportunities to the U.S., the U.K. and Australia **to engage the regional countries**.

AUKUS engagement with regional countries

- All three nations will also play a major role in U.S.-led programmes such as Build Back Better World, Blue Dot Network and Clean Network, to meet the challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- The Quad and AUKUS are distinct, yet complementary. Neither diminishes the other.
- Whereas the Quad initiatives straddle the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, a **Pacific-centric orientation for AUKUS has advantages**.
- Such a strategy could **potentially strengthen Japan's security** as well as that of Taiwan in the face of China's mounting bellicosity.
- Shifting AUKUS's fulcrum to the Pacific Ocean could **reassure ASEAN nations**.

- It could also inure AUKUS to any insidious insinuation that accretion in the number of nuclear submarines plying the Indo-Pacific might upset the balance of power in the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

There are limited options in the economic arena with China already having emerged as a global economic powerhouse. AUKUS, though, provides an opportunity to the U.S. to place proxy submarine forces to limit China's forays, especially in the Pacific Ocean.

3. Haryana law on local hiring causes concern

- The **Haryana Government's law to reserve 75% jobs for locals** has been notified recently.

Provisions of the law:

- The law requires firms with 10 or more employees to reserve 75% of all jobs offering a salary of less than ₹30,000 a month for eligible candidates of State domicile.
- The law applies to private companies, societies, trusts, and partnership firms, among others, located in the state.
- There would be a penalty for non-compliance.
- **An exemption can be claimed by employers** when enough local candidates are not available with the desired skills, qualifications, and proficiency. However, an officer of the rank of deputy commissioner or higher will evaluate such a claim.

Concerns:

Reduced talent pool:

- Haryana currently does not have enough captive supply of skilled labour and the proposed law by **disallowing the influx of talent from other parts of the country** will lead to a **depleted pool of skilled labour in technology sectors** such as IT and IT-enabled services (ITeS).

Lead to 'unease' of doing business:

- The new law adversely **impacts the freedom of the companies to take business decisions**. Curbs of any kind ultimately affect business freedom and **could impact its productivity and competitiveness** and its ability to flourish.
 - The industry needs the most efficient workforce to stay competitive in a globalised world.

- Also, provisions like the need to take permission from notified authorities to employ outsiders beyond a certain threshold might lead to the **inspector raj like regime**.
- This could **disincentivize new investments in the state**.

Shifting of investment:

- This could trigger an exodus of large domestic and multinational investors across sectors such as auto and information technology that rely on highly skilled manpower, from hubs such as Gurugram.
 - Notably in recent times, large firms, particularly in e-commerce, IT & ITeS and new manufacturing sectors, had chosen Gurugram as a hub for their businesses.
- The shifting of companies to other states will **adversely impact not only the state's revenue sources (through corporate tax) but also the employment opportunities** available to the workforce. This **does not augur well for economic recovery in the post-pandemic phase**.

For more detailed information on this issue refer to the following article:

Recommendations:

- **Giving reservations in jobs is only a temporary solution, the need of the hour is to focus on better job creation and skill development.** The state governments should focus on ensuring adequate investments in **education, health and skill development**.
- Instead of compelling firms to hire locals, the State can consider giving a 25% subsidy to firms as an incentive for hiring locals.
- The government can come up with certain **incentives for companies that are investing money in training the local youths**. Such incentives could be in the form of capital for better skill development, lower electricity charges, better infrastructure facilities, etc.
- Even if the state decides to go ahead with the local reservation provision, the government should consider lowering the salary ceiling to Rs. 15,000 a month on a 'cost to company' basis and raise it in tandem with efforts to improve skill sets in the State.
- Also, the reservation, if implemented should begin from 20%-25% to allow for sufficient time for the creation of a talent pool within the state as technical and specialised skill sets will take time to inculcate among the State's youth.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Principles of Responsible Banking (PRBs)

Global banks are pledging to report annually on the carbon emissions linked to the projects they lend to in an extension to the Principles for Responsible Banking (PRBs).

What are PRBs?

- The PRBs are a unique framework for ensuring that signatory banks' strategy and practice align with the vision society has set out for its future in the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- It was created in 2019 through a partnership between founding banks and the United Nations.
- The framework consists of 6 Principles designed to bring purpose, vision and ambition to sustainable finance.
- Signatory banks commit to embedding these 6 principles across all business areas, at the strategic, portfolio and transactional levels:

Significance of the PRBs

- Banks can contribute to solving the climate crisis from two angles: their lending and their investments.
- Many bank policies concentrate their investments on securities that were focused on sustainability.

Issues with PRB

- Being a signatory to the PRBs is a limited commitment.
- Signatories have four years to comply with the principles.
- Even then, everything is voluntary and non-binding, so signatories are not penalized or even named and shamed for failing to live up to the principles.

Way forward

- When signatories to the PRBs are lending money, they are supposed to carry out environmental impact assessments and to measure the greenhouse gas emissions of projects.
- This is not a minor issue considering that such work is beyond the traditional competencies of banks and will significantly affect their operational costs.
- Signatories are also supposed to ensure that loans go to projects that are carbon neutral.

5. A new jurisprudence for political prisoners

- Students from Kerala who were charged under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for alleged Maoist links have been granted bail by the Supreme Court by setting aside the objections of the National Investigation Agency.

Background

- The case involved students from Kerala, who were pursuing Journalism and Law respectively.
- The police had allegedly seized objectionable printed and written materials from them which include violent exhortations for civil war, in tune with Maoist ideology.
- The police registered the case and later the investigation was handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

The provisions of the UAPA were invoked.

Provisions of the UAPA

Section 13

- It deals with participating in or inciting unlawful activities.
- It is the provision about punishment for unlawful activities.

Section 38

- Offence relating to membership of a terrorist organisation.
 - A person, who associates himself, or professes to be associated, with a terrorist organisation with intention to further its activities, commits an offence relating to membership of a terrorist organisation.

Section 39

- It deals with “offence relating to support given to a terrorist organisation.”

Arguments in favour of the Accused

- Both the accused were students and there were no allegations of any overt act of violence.
- At a formative young age, the accused might have been fascinated by what is propagated by CPI (Maoist).
- There was no prima facie material to show an intention on the part of the accused to further the activities of the terrorist organisation.

SC Observation

- Mere association with a terrorist organisation is not sufficient to attract Section 38 and mere support given to a terrorist organisation is not sufficient to attract Section 39 of UAPA.
- The association and the support have to be with the intention of furthering the activities of a terrorist organisation.
 - Such intention, according to the court, can be inferred from the overt acts or acts of active participation of the accused in the activities of a terrorist organisation.
- Mere possession of documents or books by the accused at a formative young age, or even their fascination for an ideology, does not ipso facto or ipso jure make out an offence, the Court ruled.

Section 43D(5) of the UAPA

- It says that for many of the offences under the Act, bail should not be granted, if “on perusal of the case diary or the report (of the investigation)... there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation ... is prima facie true”.
 - As opposed to the general criminal law, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), grant of bail is the exception.
 - If the prosecution either through the case diary or through the chargesheet is able to show ‘reasonable grounds’ for believing that the accusation is prima facie true, then the accused “shall not be released on bail”.
- Thus, the Act prompts the Court to consider the version of the prosecution alone while deciding the question of bail.

Concerns

- Unlike the Criminal Procedure Code, the UAPA, by virtue of the proviso to Section 43D(2), permits keeping a person in prison for up to 180 days, without even filing a charge sheet.
- Thus, broad offences included under the UAPA and difficult bail conditions mean individuals can be detained indefinitely even without conviction of the accused.

Presumption of guilt

National Investigation Agency (NIA) vs Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali

- In Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali, the Court said that by virtue of Section 43D(5) of UAPA, the burden is on the accused to show that the prosecution case is not prima facie true.
- Many intellectuals including Sudha Bharadwaj and Siddique Kappan were denied bail based on a narrow interpretation of the bail provision as done in Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali.

Thwaha Faisal v Union of India

- The Court, in Thwaha Faisal, refused to construct Section 43D(5) in a narrow and restrictive sense.
- It has to some extent, liberalised an otherwise illiberal bail clause.

Union of India vs K.A. Najeeb (2021)

- For granting bail in Thwaha Faisal the SC relied on a decision in Union of India vs K.A. Najeeb (2021).
- In K.A. Najeeb, the larger Bench said that even the stringent provisions under Section 43D(5) do not curtail the power of the constitutional court to grant bail on the ground of violation of fundamental rights.

Challenges in the interpretation of laws

- The text of the UAPA limits judicial discretion and adjudication. This is more evident in the context of bail.
- As part of interpretation, the court usually has two approaches:
 - Literal Interpretation
 - To read and apply the provision literally and mechanically which has the effect of curtailing the individual freedom as intended by the makers of the law.
 - In contrast to this approach, there could be a constitutional reading of the statute, which perceives the issues from a human rights angle and tries to mitigate the rigour of the vicious content of the law.
- The former approach is reflected in Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali and the latter in Thwaha Faisal.

Significance

- In this case, the Court has asserted the primacy of judicial process over the text of the enactment, by way of an interpretative exercise.
- The Court has acted in its introspective jurisdiction and deconstructed the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) with a great sense of legal realism.

Way forward

- The judgment should be invoked to release other political prisoners in the country who have been denied bail either due to the harshness of the law or due to the follies in understanding the law or both.

Conclusion

- Thwaha Faisal vs Union of India thus paves the way for a formidable judicial authority against blatant misuse of the draconian law.

6. World Heritage sites in India:

- **World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO** for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance.
- Of the over 1,150 such sites globally (as of July 2021), **India has 40 of them, the second-most in the continent and sixth overall.** This includes 32 cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed heritage site.
- The **walled city of Ahmedabad** has the distinction of being the **first city in India to be accorded the status of a UNESCO world heritage site.**
 - The city was **founded by Sultan Ahmad Shah in the 15th century**, on the eastern bank of the Sabarmati River. It presents a rich architectural heritage from the sultanate period, notably the Bhadra citadel, the walls and gates of the Fort city and numerous mosques and tombs as well as important Hindu and Jain temples of later periods. The urban fabric is made up of densely-packed traditional houses (pols) in gated traditional streets (puras) with characteristic features such as bird feeders, public wells and religious institutions.
- Of the 40 inscribed sites located in India, **Khangchendzonga National Park is the only 'Mixed World Heritage Site' in India** having fulfilled the nomination criteria under both natural and cultural heritage.
 - Located at the heart of the Himalayan range in northern India (State of Sikkim), the Khangchendzonga National Park includes a unique diversity of plains, valleys, lakes, glaciers and spectacular snow-capped mountains covered with ancient forests, including the world's third highest peak, Mount Khangchendzonga.
- As far as antiquity is concerned, the **rock shelters of Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh are the oldest inscribed site and are said to be 30,000 years old.**
 - The Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka are in the foothills of the Vindhyan Mountains on the southern edge of the central Indian plateau. Within massive sandstone outcrops, above comparatively dense forests, are five clusters of natural rock shelters, displaying paintings that appear to **date from the Mesolithic Period** right through to the historical period.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. We need greater global cooperation

Our thinking about the international system is focussed on a new era of great power competition. An assertive China is seeking to refashion the international order and exercise greater regional hegemony.

Refashioning the international order

- Recently, Secretary Antony Blinken outlined the US approach to China: “Competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be.”
- This pretty much describes the approach of every country in the world to this geopolitical moment.
- The big question is whether the **competitive and adversarial dynamics** are now so deep that the space for “collaboration” is diminishing fast.
- There is now bipartisan consensus in the US that China needs to be contained; just as China is convinced that the US will not only not tolerate China’s further rise.

Great power competition between the US and China

- **Two dynamics** were supposed to counteract the risks of great power competition.
- **Global economic interdependence:** The first was global economic interdependence.
- Global trade has rebounded to its pre-pandemic levels.
- The logic of interdependence is now under severe ideological stress.
- Interdependence **has not led to greater convergence** on political values or a more open global political order.
- **Common challenges fostering global cooperation:** The second dynamic counteracting competition was the idea that common challenges like climate change, the pandemic and the risks posed by technology will foster greater global cooperation.
- All the global crises that should have been occasions for global cooperation have become the sites for intensifying global competition.

Climate and global health: Indicator of lack of global cooperation

- It is hard to convince anyone that most countries of the world were willing to **treat the pandemic as a global public health crisis**.

- The shift in the climate change discourse is about intensifying technological competition and maintaining national economic supremacy, rather than solving a global problem.
- It is not entirely clear that all the innovations induced by this competitive dynamic will, in fact, limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- It also leaves the question of a modicum of **justice in the international order** entirely unresolved.
- We have also learnt over the last couple of decades that the international system, and all global public goods, including security, can be made extremely vulnerable even by small groups carrying a sense of grievance.
- So, the distribution of **technology, finance, and developmental space** will matter.
- India, in the context of what other countries are doing, takes a very well-judged stance at the international level.
- But it is difficult not to wonder whether a country that lets its citizens breathe the foulest air, and cannot get its head around a solvable problem of stubble burning, **can project seriousness**.
- So, climate and global public health, rather than acting as a spur to global cooperation are going to be symptoms of a deep pathology.

Global risks and declining multilateral institutions

- Areas where global risks are increasing include-Cyber threats, the possible risks of unregulated technology, whether in artificial intelligence or biological research, competition in space, a renewed competition in nuclear weapons and an intensifying arms race.
- In not a single one of these areas is there a serious prospect of any country thinking outside of **an adversarial nationalist frame**.
- The old multilateral system was undergirded by, and partially an instrument for, US power.
- The term multilateral has also been deeply damaged by a cynical use, where **it simply refers to a group of countries** rather than a single or a couple of countries acting together.
- It is high time the term be used only in a context where there is **agreement on global rules or an architecture to genuinely solve a global public goods problem**.
- These may still reflect power differentials, but at least they are oriented to problem-solving at a global level.
- In this sense, one would be hard-pressed to find any genuinely multilateral institutions left.

Conclusion

The real choice for the world is not just navigating between China and the United States. It is fundamentally between an orientation that is committed to global problem-solving rather than just preserving national supremacy.

2. What caused Earth's First Mass Extinction?

A paper published recently has come up with a new reason behind the first mass extinction, also known as the Late Ordovician mass extinction.

Species Extinction

- Extinction is a part of life, and animals and plants disappear all the time. About 98% of all the organisms that have ever existed on our planet are now extinct.
- When a species goes extinct, its role in the ecosystem is usually filled by new species, or other existing ones.

What is Mass Extinction?

- Earth's 'normal' extinction rate is often thought to be somewhere between 0.1 and 1 species per 10,000 species per 100 years.
- This is known as the background rate of extinction.
- A mass extinction event is when species vanish much faster than they are replaced.
- This is usually defined as about 75% of the world's species being lost in a 'short' amount of geological time – less than 2.8 million years.

How many mass extinctions have there been?

Five great mass extinctions have changed the face of life on Earth. We know what caused some of them, but others remain a mystery:

[I] Ordovician-Silurian ME

- It occurred **443 million years ago** and wiped out approximately 85% of all species.
- Scientists think it was caused by temperatures plummeting and huge glaciers forming, which caused sea levels to drop dramatically.
- This was followed by a period of rapid warming. Many small marine creatures died out.

[II] Devonian ME

- It took place **374 million years ago** and killed about three-quarters of the world's species, most of which were marine invertebrates that lived at the bottom of the sea.
- This was a period of many environmental changes, including global warming and cooling, a rise and fall of sea levels and a reduction in oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- We don't know exactly what triggered the extinction event.

[III] Permian ME

- It happened **250 million years ago**, was the largest and most devastating event of the five.
- Also known as the Great Dying, it eradicated more than 95% of all species, including most of the vertebrates which had begun to evolve by this time.
- Some scientists think Earth was hit by a large asteroid which filled the air with dust particles that blocked out the Sun and caused acid rain.
- Others think there was a large volcanic explosion that increased carbon dioxide and made the oceans toxic.

[IV] Triassic ME

- It took place **200 million years ago**, eliminating about 80% of Earth's species, including many types of dinosaurs.
- This was probably caused by colossal geological activity that increased carbon dioxide levels and global temperatures, as well as ocean acidification.

[V] Cretaceous ME

- It occurred **65 million years ago**, killing 78% of all species, including the remaining non-avian dinosaurs.
- This was most likely caused by an asteroid hitting the Earth in what is now Mexico, potentially compounded by ongoing flood volcanism in what is now India.

What caused first ME?

- The cooling climate likely changed the ocean circulation pattern.
- This caused a disruption in the flow of oxygen-rich water from the shallow seas to deeper oceans, leading to a mass extinction of marine creatures.
- Ordovician Sea has familiar groups like clams and snails and sponges.
- Many other groups are now very reduced in diversity or entirely extinct like trilobites, brachiopods, and crinoids.

The sixth mass extinction

- We are currently experiencing a sixth mass extinction as the result of human-induced climate change.
- There have been several theories behind each mass extinction and with advances in new technologies, researchers have been uncovering more intricate details about these events.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3.A brief history of India's Poverty Levels

Poverty in India had increased between 2012 and 2020.

Poverty

- Fundamentally, the concept of poverty is associated with **socially perceived deprivation** with respect to basic human needs (Tendulkar, 2009).
- This is a crucial definition to consider since the Tendulkar committee's estimation method is the last officially recognized method for arriving at poverty numbers in India.

A relative term

- If you think about it for a moment, poverty is a "relative" concept.
- Poverty is essentially about how you are "**relative**" to those in your surroundings.
- For example, with Rs 1,000 in your pocket, you may be "rich" if those around you have no more than Rs 100 with them.
- But, in another setting, say around those who have no less than Rs 10,000 with them, you will come across as "poor".
- As such, as long as there are variations in the income and/or wealth levels in a society, there will be "poverty".

What is abject poverty?

- Apart from the relative nature of poverty, there is such a thing as abject poverty.
- It typically refers to a state where **a person is unable to meet its most basic needs** such as eating the minimum amount of food to stay alive.

What is a Poverty Line?

- From the point of view of policymaking, poverty levels typically refer to some level of income or expenditure below which one can reasonably argue that someone is poorer than the rest of the society.
- The whole point of the bulk of policymaking is to improve the living standards of the poorest in the country.
- But to design policies, one must first know what the target group is, how much does it earn (or spend, since robust data on income is not easily available).
- This is done by choosing a "poverty line" – or **a level of income or consumption expenditure that divides the population between the poor and non-poor.**

Why define a Poverty Line?

The purpose behind choosing a poverty line is two-fold.

(A) To accurately design policies for the poor

- Doing so allows you to target your policies towards the two poorest people in the country.
- Often such policies are redistributive in nature – such as giving subsidised food grains or providing some kind of social security like MGNREGA.
- In an ideal world a government would have the resources to help everyone in the economy but in reality, even the government's works within some financial or budgetary constraints.

(B) To assess the success or failure of government policies over time

- Over time the overall GDP doubles but the income of the general public falls.
- Hence the government would know that its policies are not bearing fruit.

Poverty Estimation in India

- **Planning Commission Expert Group (1962):** It formulated the separate poverty lines for rural and urban areas at ₹20 and ₹25 per capita per year respectively.
- **VM Dandekar and N Rath (1971):** They made the first systematic assessment, based on National Sample Survey (NSS) data. They suggested providing 2250 calories per day in both rural and urban areas.
- **YK Alagh Committee (1979):** It constructed a poverty line for rural and urban areas on the basis of nutritional requirements and related consumption expenditure.
- **Lakdawala Committee (1993):** It suggested that consumption expenditure should be calculated based on calorie consumption as earlier. State specific poverty lines should be constructed. It asked for discontinuation of scaling of poverty estimates based on National Accounts Statistics.
- **Tendulkar Committee (2009):** The current official measures of poverty are based on the Tendulkar poverty line, fixed at daily expenditure of ₹27.2 in rural areas and ₹33.3 in urban areas is criticised by many for being too low.

What has happened in India's fight against poverty?

- There are two ways to assess India's performance.
 1. One is to look at the headcount ratio of poverty which is the percentage of India's population that was designated to be below the poverty line
 2. The other variable to look at is the absolute number of poor people in the country
- If one looks at the headcount ratio then India made rapid strides since 1973.

- Even though India is home to possibly the largest number of poor people in the world, there has been no official update on India's poverty levels since.

Who oversees the Poverty Level?

- Poverty levels are updated by using the Consumer Expenditure Survey, which is conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) once every five years.
- The last such survey was conducted in 2017-18.
- That survey reportedly showed that for the first time in four decades consumer expenditure in India had fallen.

What are the latest findings?

- Poverty levels, as well as the absolute number of poor, had risen between 2011-12 and 2017-18.
- The government claimed that the survey suffered from "data quality" issues.
- The next round of the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) was supposed to be conducted in 2021.

Causes of rise in Poverty

- **GDP growth decline:** It is a fact that India's GDP growth rate had registered a secular deceleration between the start of 2017 and 2020.
- **Jobless growth:** The second and related factor is the unprecedented rise in joblessness.
- **Wages decline:** Millions were pulled out of poverty between 2004 and 2011 due to sharp rise in non-farm employment and associated wages. But for many of those workers, real wages have either fallen or stagnated.
- **Pandemic impact:** Covid induced lockdown sent millions of workers back to villages, seeking MGNREGA work at minimum wages.

4. Turmeric Cultivation in India

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), native to India, has been studied extensively for its effects against viral diseases in recent decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed interest.

About Turmeric

- Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) is used as a condiment, dye, drug and cosmetic in addition to its use in religious ceremonies.
- India is a leading producer and exporter of turmeric in the world.

- The top five turmeric-producing states of India in 2020-21 are Telangana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Climate and Soil

- Turmeric can be grown in diverse tropical conditions from sea level to 1500 m above sea level.
- It requires a temperature range of 20-35 C with an annual rainfall of 1500 mm or more, under rainfed or irrigated conditions.
- Though it can be grown on different types of soils, it thrives best in well-drained sandy or clay loam soils with a pH range of 4.5-7.5 with good organic status.

Varieties

- A number of cultivars are available in the country and are known mostly by the name of locality where they are cultivated.
- Some of the popular cultivars are Duggirala, Tekkurpet, Sugandham, Amalapuram, Erode local, Salem, Alleppey, Moovattupuzha and Lakdong.

Preparation of land

- The land is prepared with the receipt of early monsoon showers.
- The soil is brought to a fine tilth by giving about four deep ploughings.
- Planting is also done by forming ridges and furrows.

Plantation

- Whole or split mother and finger rhizomes are used for planting and well-developed healthy and disease-free rhizomes are to be selected.

Why turmeric?

- Post pandemic, turmeric is one of the fastest-growing dietary supplements.
- The global curcumin market, valued at \$58.4 million in 2019, is expected to witness a growth of 12.7 percent by 2027.
- As the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of turmeric, India stands to gain from this.

Global standing

- India produces 78 per cent of the world's turmeric.
- The country's turmeric production saw a near consistent growth since Independence till 2010-11 after which it started fluctuating.

- The pandemic has given a boost to the crop, with the production witnessing a rise of 23 per cent.
- Though the production and export of turmeric has risen, farmers have not benefitted from its pricing.

5. Srinagar declared a 'major airport'

The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation declared the Srinagar airport a “major airport” under the Airports Economic Authority Act, 2008 (AERA).

Key takeaways

- In exercise of the powers conferred by the Airports Economic Authority Act, 2008, the Central Government has declared the airport of Srinagar as major airport.
- The move will allow the AERA to determine the tariff, including the development fee and passenger service fee, for aeronautical services at the Srinagar airport.
 - The Centre designates an airport as a major airport if it crosses a particular volume of annual passenger traffic.
- Previously, the Airports Authority of India, a body under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, used to determine the tariff for the Srinagar airport.

About Airports Economic Regulatory Authority Act

- The AERA regulates tariffs and other charges for aeronautical services provided at civilian airports with annual traffic above 15 lakh passengers.
- It also monitors the performance standard of services across these airports.
- **Definition of major airports:** The Act defines a major airport as one with annual passenger traffic over 15 lakh, or any other airports as notified by the central government. The Bill increases the threshold of annual passenger traffic for major airports to over 35 lakh.
- **Tariff determination by AERA:** Under the Act, AERA is responsible for determining:
 - the tariff for aeronautical services at different airports every five years
 - the development fees of major airports
 - the passengers service fee.
- The AERA amendment Bill 2021 also adds that the central government may group airports and notify the group as a major airport.

6. Messier 87

Scientists studying the galaxy Messier 87 (M87) – which surrounds the only black hole to have been imaged so far – have come up with a theoretical model of the jets of material emanating from M87.

Key takeaways

- The calculated images published in Nature Astronomy resemble closely what is observed, and help confirm Einstein’s theory of relativity.
- Messier 87 (also known as Virgo A or NGC 4486, generally abbreviated to M87) is a supergiant elliptical galaxy with several trillion stars in the constellation Virgo.
- One of the most massive galaxies in the local universe, it has a large population of globular clusters – about 15,000 compared with the 150–200 orbiting the Milky Way – and a jet of energetic plasma that originates at the core and extends at least 4,900 light-years, traveling at a relativistic speed.
- It is one of the brightest radio sources in the sky and a popular target for both amateur and professional astronomers.



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to Vamsadhara River:

1. Mahendratana River is a major tributary of Vamsadhara.
2. Vamsadhara River Water Dispute is between Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- River Vamsadhara is an important east flowing river between Rushikulya and Godavari, in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh states in India.
- Mahendratanaya River is a major tributary river of Vamsadhara. **Hence Statement 1 is correct.**
- The Vamsadhara water dispute is between the states of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. **Hence Statement 2 is incorrect.**

2. With respect to the SOHO satellite, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a joint mission of the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).
2. It is a mission to explore the planet Mercury.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- SOHO was launched on December 2, 1995.
- SOHO, the Solar & Heliospheric Observatory, is a project of international collaboration between ESA and NASA. **Hence Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- SOHO aims to study the Sun from its deep core to the outer corona and the solar wind. **Hence Statement 2 is incorrect.**

3. Consider the following statements:

1. Tigray Region the Northernmost regional state in Ethiopia is bordered by Eritrea to the north and Djibouti to the East.
2. Ethiopia is the largest landlocked country in the world.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both

d. None

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Tigray Region in Ethiopia borders Eritrea and Sudan (**Not Djibouti**). Hence **Statement 1 is incorrect**.
- Ethiopia is the sixth largest landlocked country in the world. The largest landlocked country in the world is Kazakhstan followed by Mongolia, Chad, Niger, Mali. Hence **Statement 2 is incorrect**.

4. With reference to the Advocate General of the State, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Advocate General is appointed by the President.
2. Article 165 has provided for the office of Advocate general for the States.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Advocate General of the State is the highest law officer of the state.
- The **Governor(Not President)** appoints the advocate general of state on the advice of the council of ministers of the state. Hence **Statement 1 is incorrect**.
- Article 165 of the Indian Constitution is related to the office of Advocate General of State. Hence **Statement 2 is correct**.

5. Under the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, the Centre can designate an airport as a 'Major Airport' if it has an annual passenger traffic of at least

- a. 20 Lakhs
- b. 25 lakhs
- c. 30 lakhs

d. 35 lakhs

Answer: d

Explanation:

- According to the rules of the Airports Economic Authority Act of 2008, the Centre has the power to recognise an airport as a major airport.
- Under the AERA, the Centre can designate an airport as a major airport if it has an annual passenger traffic of at least **35 lakh. Hence Option D is correct.**

6. 'Doctors without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres)', often in the news, is

- a. A division of World Health Organization
- b. A non-governmental international organization
- c. An inter-governmental agency sponsored by European Union
- d. A specialized agency of the United Nations

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Médecins Sans Frontières, is also rendered in English as Doctors Without Borders.
- It is an international humanitarian medical non-governmental organisation of French origin. **Hence Option B is correct.**
- It is best known for its projects in conflict zones and in countries affected by endemic diseases.