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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. First National Achievement Survey (NAS) held

The first National Achievement Survey (NAS) in four years was conducted, in a bid to assess the competencies of children in Class 3, 5 and 8.

National Achievement Survey (NAS)

- NAS is a nationally representative large-scale survey of students' learning undertaken by the Ministry of Education.
- It is implemented on a sample size aiming to assess students of 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th
- It gives a system level reflection on effectiveness of school education.
- The NCERT has developed the Assessment Framework for gauging the competencies attained by the student's vis-a-vis learning outcomes.

Features of the Survey

- The Survey goes beyond the scorecard and includes the background variables to correlate student's performance in different learning outcomes vis-a-vis contextual variables.
- The Survey was conducted in a monitored environment in the sampled schools.
- Selection of sampled schools was based on UDISE+ (Unified District Information System for Education) 2019-20 data.

Significance of NAS

- NAS findings would help diagnose learning gaps of students and determine interventions required in education policies, teaching practices and learning.
- Through its diagnostic report cards, NAS findings help in capacity building for teachers, officials involved in the delivery of education.
- This will help to assess the learning interruptions and new learnings during the COVID pandemic and help to take remedial measures.

2. Mosques to honour 1921 Malabar Rebellion martyrs

Granite plaquettes featuring the names of Variamkunnathu Kunjahamad Haji, Ali Musliyar, and other martyrs of the 1921 Malabar Rebellion will be put up at the precincts of a few mosques in Ernakulam.

Malabar Rebellion

- The Malabar Rebellion in 1921 started as resistance against the British colonial rule and the feudal system in southern Malabar but ended in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.
- There were a series of clashes between Mappila peasantry and their landlords, supported by the British, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- It began as a reaction against a heavy-handed crackdown on the Khilafat Movement, a campaign in defence of the Ottoman Caliphate by the British authorities in the Eranad and Valluvanad taluks of Malabar.
- The Mappilas attacked and took control of police stations, British government offices, courts and government treasuries.

Who was Variyankunna Kunjahammed Haji?

- He was one of the leaders of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921.
- He raised 75000 natives, seized control of large territory from the British rule and set up a parallel government.
- In January 1922, under the guise of a treaty, the British betrayed Haji through his close friend Unyan Musaliyar, arresting him from his hideout and producing him before a British judge.
- He was sentenced to death along with his compatriots.

3. PM to inaugurate Kashi Corridor Project

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project.

Details:

- The Kashi Corridor project is significant for Uttar Pradesh's cultural politics.
- The project incorporates the idea of Ahalya Bai Holkar, the Holkar queen of Indore, who built a sequence of temples that lead up to the Ganga ghat.
- Kashi Corridor Project comprises the following components:

- A 320-meter-long and 20-meter-wide paved pathway that connects the temple to the ghats.
- A museum, a library, a pilgrim facilitation centre, and a salvation home.

Ahilyabai Holkar

- At the early age of eight, Ahilyabai got married to Khanderao Holkar in 1733.
- In the battle of Kumbher in 1754, her husband was killed, leaving her a widow at the age of 29.
- After that, for the sake of the administration of the kingdom and the lives of her people, she resolved to take matters into her own hands.
- In 1767, she assumed the crown and became the ruler of Indore.
- In the 18th century, Ahilyabai Holkar supported industrialization while spreading the concept of dharma.

Development Work by Ahilyabai Holkar

- Ahilyabai is known for constructing multiple forts and roads in the Malwa area, as well as supporting festivals and donating to various Hindu temples.
- Her benevolence was reflected in the construction of temples, ghats, wells, tanks, and rest houses that spanned the length of the nation.
- In the capital of her kingdom, Maheshwar, the queen also built a textile industry.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)

States in the National Capital Region were directed to be ready to implement actions under the 'emergency' category of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to control air pollution, said an official order.

Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)

- In 2014, when a study by the WHO found that Delhi was the most polluted city in the world, panic spread in the Centre and the state government.
- Approved by the Supreme Court in 2016, the plan was formulated after several meetings that the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) held with state government and experts.

- The result was a plan that institutionalized measures to be taken when air quality deteriorates.
- GRAP works only as an emergency measure.

How does it work?

- As such, the plan does not include action by various state governments to be taken throughout the year to tackle industrial, vehicular and combustion emissions.
- When the air quality shifts from poor to very poor, the measures listed under both sections have to be followed since the plan is incremental in nature.
- If air quality reaches the severe+ stage, GRAP talks about shutting down schools and implementing the odd-even road-space rationing scheme.

Measures taken under GRAP

1) Severe+ or Emergency

(PM 2.5 over 300 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cubic metre}$ or PM10 over 500 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cu. m.}$ for 48+ hours)

- Stop entry of trucks into Delhi (except essential commodities)
- Stop construction work
- Introduce odd/even scheme for private vehicles and minimise exemptions
- Task Force to decide any additional steps including shutting of schools

2) Severe

(PM 2.5 over 250 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cu. m.}$ or PM10 over 430 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cu. m.}$)

- Close brick kilns, hot mix plants, stone crushers
- Maximise power generation from natural gas to reduce generation from coal
- Encourage public transport, with differential rates
- More frequent mechanized cleaning of road and sprinkling of water

3) Very Poor

(PM2.5 121-250 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cu. m.}$ or PM10 351-430 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cu. m.}$)

- Stop use of diesel generator sets
- Enhance parking fee by 3-4 times
- Increase bus and Metro services
- Apartment owners to discourage burning fires in winter by providing electric heaters during winter
- Advisories to people with respiratory and cardiac conditions to restrict outdoor movement

4) Moderate to poor

(PM2.5 61-120 µg/cu. m. or PM10 101-350 µg/cu. m.)

- Heavy fines for garbage burning
- Close/enforce pollution control regulations in brick kilns and industries
- Mechanized sweeping on roads with heavy traffic and water sprinkling
- Strictly enforce a ban on firecrackers

Has GRAP helped?

- The biggest success of GRAP has been in fixing accountability and deadlines.
- For each action to be taken under a particular air quality category, executing agencies are clearly marked.
- In a territory like Delhi, where a multiplicity of authorities has been a long-standing impediment to effective governance, this step made a crucial difference.

5. New RBI initiatives:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched two customer-centric initiatives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI):

1. The RBI Retail Direct Scheme.
2. The Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme.

The two schemes will expand the scope of investment in the country and make access to capital markets easier and more secure for investors.

What is the RBI Retail Direct Scheme?

The Scheme is aimed at **enhancing access to the government securities market for retail investors.**

- It offers them a **new avenue for directly investing in the securities** issued by the Centre and the state governments.
- Investors will be able to easily open and maintain their government securities account online with the RBI, free of cost.
- The scheme offers a portal avenue to invest in central government securities, treasury bills, state development loans and Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs).

- The scheme places India in a list of select few countries offering such a facility.

What is the Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme?

- It is aimed at further improving the grievance redress mechanism for resolving customer complaints against entities regulated by the central bank.
- The central theme of the scheme is based on ‘**One Nation-One Ombudsman**’ with one portal, one email and one address for the customers to lodge their complaints.
- The RBI has decided to **integrate the three ombudsman schemes into one** and also simplified the scheme by covering all complaints involving deficiency in service by centralising the receipt and initial processing of complaints to enhance process efficiency.
- **RB-IOs will do away with the jurisdictional limitations as well as limited grounds for complaints.** RBI will provide a single reference point for the customers to submit documents, track status of complaints filed and provide feedback.

Please note that:

The central bank’s alternate grievance redress mechanism currently comprises **three ombudsman schemes** – the Banking Ombudsman Scheme (BOS), launched in 1995, the Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies (OS-NBFC), 2018 and the Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions (OSDT), 2019.

Importance of the schemes:

- The move comes at a time when rising inflation adds pressure on the RBI to lift rates.
- Tighter monetary policy is likely to weaken the demand for bonds, making it challenging for the government to execute its near-record borrowing program.
- Other emerging-market nations in Asia, like the Philippines, have also sought to raise funds from citizens to battle the pandemic.

6. Centre allows seven states to borrow more

The Finance Ministry has permitted seven States to borrow an additional ₹16,691 crore, linked to their having met specified capital expenditure targets in the June to September quarter.

Background:

- States were required to achieve at least 45% of their capex targets for the year by the second quarter to be eligible for a nod to raise incremental borrowings from the market.
- Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan and Telangana had met the targets for the first half of the year.

Why do states need the centre's permission while borrowing? Is it mandatory for all states?

Article 293(3) of the Constitution requires states to obtain the Centre's consent in order to borrow **in case the state is indebted to the Centre over a previous loan.**

- This consent can also be granted subject to certain conditions by virtue of **Article 293(4).**
- In practice, the Centre has been exercising this power in accordance with the recommendations of **the Finance Commission.**

Every single state is currently indebted to the Centre and thus, **all of them require the Centre's consent in order to borrow.**

Does the Centre have unfettered power to impose conditions under this provision?

Neither does the provision itself offer any guidance on this, nor is there any judicial precedent that one could rely on.

- Interestingly, even though **this question formed part of the terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission,** it was **not addressed in its interim report.**

So, when can the centre impose conditions?

The Centre can impose conditions **only when it gives consent for state borrowing**, and it can only **give such consent when the state is indebted to the Centre**.

Why are such restrictions necessary?

- One possible purpose behind conferring this power upon the Centre was **to protect its interests in the capacity of a creditor**.
- A broader purpose of **ensuring macroeconomic stability** is also discernible, since state indebtedness negatively affects the fiscal health of the nation as a whole.

7. Cybercrime went up by 500% during pandemic:

The 14th edition of **c0c0n**, the annual cyber security and hacking conference is being organised by the Kerala Police.

- At the event, **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat** has stressed **the need for a national framework to thwart cyber attacks** that have been on the rise in the country.

Need for cybersecurity:

With data gradually transcending into the open domain with numerous firms permitting employees to work from their homes amid the pandemic, sensitive information has become susceptible to security vulnerabilities. The rise of digital payments has also increased complex cyber crimes.

- Also, Cyber crimes have gone up by almost 500% in India during the global pandemic.
- **The Information Technology Act, 2000**, that dealt with cybersecurity and cyber crimes is not equipped to consider new-age changes in the mode of functioning of businesses and modus operandi of crimes in cyberspace.

Need of the hour:

- While a **National Cybersecurity Strategy** is in the offing, the country is also in dire need of a **data protection law**, with cybercriminals increasingly weaponising data as a tool against national security in the post-pandemic era.
- We need to consider the emerging threats from new technologies such as drones, ransomware, Internet of Things (IoT) devices and also the role of nation states in such cyber attacks.

Steps taken by the Government to spread awareness about cyber crimes:

1. **Online cybercrime reporting portal** has been launched to enable complainants to report complaints pertaining to Child Pornography/ Child Sexual Abuse Material, rape/ gang rape imageries or sexually explicit content.
2. A scheme for establishment of **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** has been established to handle issues related to cybercrime in the country in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
3. Establishment of **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)** for protection of critical information infrastructure in the country.
4. All organizations providing digital services have been mandated to report cyber security incidents to **CERT-In** expeditiously.
5. **Cyber Swachhta Kendra** (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) has been launched for providing detection of malicious programmes and free tools to remove such programmes.
6. **Formulation of Crisis Management Plan** for countering cyber attacks and cyber terrorism.

What needs to be done ahead?

- Regularly issue alerts/ advisories, l.
- Capacity building/ training of law enforcement personnel/ prosecutors/ judicial officers.
- Improving cyber forensics facilities etc.
- Speed up investigation.

Finally, '**Police**' and '**Public Order**' are **State subjects** as per the Constitution of India. States/UTs are primarily responsible for prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crimes through their law enforcement machinery.

8. Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

A Parliamentary panel deliberating on the Personal Data Protection Bill has made the following recommendations:

- Limit the exemptions available to the government under the current version by placing reasonable restrictions on how the exemption can be availed.
- The government be exempted only under a “just, fair, reasonable and proportionate procedure”.
- The government keep non-personal data “including anonymous data” outside the purview of the personal data protection bill.

Background:

The draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in 2019 which was tasked to come up with a report on its recommendations on the various provisions in the bill.

What's the issue?

Currently, the contentious clause 35 of the draft data protection bill allows the government and its agencies to gain blanket exemptions from complying with any and all provisions of the bill, with no checks and balances in place.

- Agencies like the Aadhaar authority UIDAI and the Income Tax Department have already sought to be exempted from the bill.

9. Small investors, salaried can now buy govt. bonds easily: PM

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off two Reserve Bank of India (RBI) initiatives.

Details:

- The two Reserve Bank of India (RBI) initiatives are:
 - To make it easier for small investors to directly invest in government securities.

- To provide a simpler single-window redressal mechanism for customers of RBI-regulated entities such as banks, finance companies and payment service providers.
- Three existing ombudsman schemes of the RBI for banking, non-banking financial companies and digital transactions will be integrated.

Benefits:

- It will provide cost-free redress of customer complaints involving deficiency in services.
- These schemes will make it easier for small investors to invest in a safe and simple manner in government securities.
- An integrated ombudsman would serve as a facility where all grievances of the people can be redressed.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. For inclusive development, support Dalit entrepreneurs

In a departure from the fixation on traditional parameters for the study of Dalit rights and empowerment, there is now a focus on how market forces can be expanded to address social exclusion.

How Dalit entrepreneurship can help in Dalit entrepreneurship

- While entrepreneurship alone isn't the panacea to caste-based exclusion or marginalisation, Dalit entrepreneurship is the new narrative changing the discourse of Dalit empowerment.
- Entrepreneurship can shape access to rights and push against entrenched social hierarchies.
- The circulation of material benefits and the relative autonomy that comes with entrepreneurship are added advantages.
- As per the reports by the MSME ministry, Dalit-owned ventures are still minimal in terms of numbers as well as revenue.

- To overcome hindrances to the establishment of networks across various social groups, Dalit entrepreneurs take recourse to their internal ties and use them to sustain their economic gains.
- It is increasingly becoming clear that supporting Dalits entrepreneurs is integral to the nation's **inclusive development** and this is why **institutional aid is required in this regard**.

Steps taken so far

- The District Industries Centre (DIC) stipulates that to nurture entrepreneurs, the government must increase the share of goods produced by Dalits in its procurement.
- State financial corporations have also been instructed to increase financial support to Scheduled Caste entrepreneurs.
- The Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation has allocated 16.2 per cent of plots to SC entrepreneurs, while the Small Industries Development Bank of India offers an additional subsidy to them.
- One of the focussed financial interventions for SC/ST entrepreneurs is the **Stand Up India initiative**, guaranteeing credit up to Rs 1 crore.

Challenges

- Stand Up India initiative failed to deliver the expected results due to the unavailability of so-called eligible SC/ST entrepreneurship, with most of the fund lying unutilised.
- This was primarily due to the apathy of loaning branches and officials towards proposals by Dalit entrepreneurs.
- It is evident that despite the existence of government schemes and policies to support such initiatives, the actual benefit could never reach the beneficiaries due to the artificial inaccessibility created by inherent social and caste biases.

Way forward

- There is a need for Dalit-focussed alternate investment finance (AIF) and private equity (PE) funds to create a vibrant and inclusive MSME ecosystem.
- It is evident that despite the existence of government schemes and policies to support such initiatives, the actual benefit could never reach the beneficiaries due to the artificial inaccessibility created by inherent social and caste biases.
- There is a need to **formulate multiple credit guarantee trusts** by raising contributions from MNCs, FDIs, portfolio investors, corporates, etc.
- A social vulnerability index also needs to be introduced, addressed and assessed.

Conclusion

Dalit entrepreneurship today holds the promise of an exciting and uncharted future for social transformation.

2. New national sample survey by ICRIER and LIRNEAsia

Only 20% of school-age children in India had access to remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic, of whom only half participated in live online lessons, according to a new national sample survey by ICRIER and LIRNEAsia, a think tank focused on digital policy.

Key Findings

- **Drop-outs:** 38% of households said at least one child had dropped out of school due to COVID-19.
- **Poor accessibility:** The survey found that although digital connectivity shot up 40% during the pandemic, low access to devices, poor signal and high costs prevented most children from reaping the benefits.
- **No educational services to the enrolled:** Among children aged 5-18, it found that 80% of those who were enrolled in schools prior to the pandemic did not receive any educational services at all during school closure.
- **Lower socio-economic classes affected:** The situation was significantly worse among those from lower socio-economic classes, where the head of the household had lower education levels, and among rural households.
- Among the 20% who received education, only 55% had access to live online classes, while 68% had access to recorded audio or video lessons.
- **Smartphone usage:** Three-fourths of the students had work sent to them over a smartphone, usually via WhatsApp, and 61% via text messages.
- **Teachers' availability:** Almost 70% had contact with their teachers via phone calls.

3. First National Achievement Survey (NAS)

Context The first National Achievement Survey (NAS) in four years was conducted recently.

- **Objective:** To assess the competencies of children in Class 3, 5 and 8.
- **Implication:** This will help to assess the learning interruptions and new learnings during the COVID pandemic and help to take remedial measures.

Key takeaways

- Since, schools across the country were closed for 18 months from March 2020, and the vast majority of students did not have any access to remote education, the NAS is expected to reveal the level of learning losses caused by the shutdown.
- The survey test was conducted in language, mathematics and environmental studies in Classes 3 and 5 and language, mathematics, science, and social science in Class 8.
- The test was **developed by** the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which will also analyse the results, while the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) **conducted** the test.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Plea on Hate Speech in Supreme Court:

Two petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court on hate speeches in the recent past.

1. One petition asked the court to issue directions for action in such cases.
2. The second plea sought special provisions, insisting that the IPC wasn't enough to deal with hate speech and rumour mongering.

Both petitions relied on a **2020 Supreme Court decision in Amish Devgun case** where hate speech was linked to the violation of unity and fraternity and breach of human dignity, which constitutes an essential facet of the right to life and liberty under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.

What's the issue?

The petitioners were concerned over concerted events in the recent past that targeted political, social and economic exclusion of Muslims through a series of rallies and hate speeches.

- The petitioners sought implementation of **guidelines on hate speech passed by Supreme Court in 2014 and on mob violence and lynching events** in a subsequent decision in 2018.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is an incitement to hatred against a particular group of persons marginalized by their religious belief, sexual orientation, gender, and so on.

- The Law Commission, in its **267th report** on hate speech, said such utterances have the potential to provoke individuals and society to commit acts of terrorism, genocide, and ethnic cleansing.

Why Hate Speech must be curbed?

1. **Internal Security:** The Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 was triggered by a fake video that incited communal passions.
2. Igniting **extremist sentiments**.
3. Mob lynching.
4. **Misinformation and disinformation:** Delhi Riots.

Measures:

1. The world's biggest social media companies, including Facebook, Google, Twitter and ByteDance, are exploring an industry-wide alliance to curb fake news on their platforms in India.
2. The Election Commission of India must tie up with tech companies to identify the creator of such news.
3. Educating the end-users.
4. The government should bring out a policy framework on the possible harm due to the internet messaging platforms to engage at a deeper level.
5. Imposing hefty fines, like in Germany the Social media companies face fines of up to €50m if they persistently fail to remove illegal content from their sites.

Need of the hour:

- Hate speech is a discursive process of pushing marginalised groups outside of social, economic and political spheres of society by disseminating hate propaganda and encouraging discrimination. At its most harmful, it is widely recognized as a precursor to ethnic cleansing.
- Public authorities must be held accountable for dereliction of the duty of care and also for non-compliance with this court's orders by not taking action to prevent vigilante groups from inciting communal disharmony and spreading hate against citizens of the country and taking the laws into their own hands.

5. COP 26 concluded

COP26 could not achieve a final agreement while being concluded recently.

- The countries shall sign the text agreement, drafted by the team of COP president Alok Sharma, which is a synthesis of all the discussions since November 1 when the COP26 began.
- The COP26 will not unveil a treaty as in 2015 when the Paris Agreement came into being.
- However, it is expected to guide implementation of the Paris Agreement, which urged countries to take steps to keep temperatures from rising beyond 2 degrees Celsius by the turn of the century and "pursue efforts to keep it" to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Besides, Developing countries such as India and China are pushing for formal acknowledgement from the West that they have not delivered on past promises of providing \$100 billion annually until 2020.

6. Launch of Customer centric initiatives of RBI

The schemes will expand the scope of investment in the country and make access to capital markets easier, more secure for investors.

Retail direct scheme has given small investors in the country a simple and safe medium of **investment in government securities**.

- Will give strength to the inclusion of everyone in the economy as it will bring in the middle class, employees, small businessmen and senior citizens with their small savings directly and securely in government securities.

- As Government securities have the provision of guaranteed settlement, this gives assurance of safety to the small investor

The Reserve Bank - Integrated Ombudsman Scheme

- One Nation, One Ombudsman System has taken shape in the banking sector with the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme
- One of the biggest touchstones of any democracy is the strength of its grievance redressal system. The Integrated Ombudsman Scheme will go a long way in that direction.

7. Chennai Floods- Climate Crisis

Chennai is flooded. The north-east monsoon over Tamil Nadu has brought with it the highest volume of rainfall within 24 hours in the last five years.

It has also revived memories of the devastating Chennai floods of 2015.

Issues

- Floods recur in major cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Dhaka, Karachi and Kathmandu, and accompany high-intensity rainfall events.
- IPCC's 6th Assessment Report (AR6) report noted the increasing frequency of heavy precipitation events since the 1950s and inferred that they were being driven by human-induced climate change.
- Climate Change is only a part of story the other part is land-centrism.

Land Centrism

- All cities in the subcontinent are waterscapes. They are threaded with rivers, speckled with wetlands and springs, and they rest on invisible aquifers.
- Yet, driven by a thirst for land, our cities are planned to subjugate water, not live with it. It is this land-centrism that undermines urban drainage.
- **Urban drainage has been sacrificed** at the for making way to land-centric urban growth.
- The **apathy for restoring disappearing urban waterways**, stands in stark contrast to the Indian government's recent obsession with reviving ancient rivers.
- Urban floods are also caused by **the design of constructed stormwater drains**. The size of their outlets should be based on the intensity of rainfall (mm/per hour) and the peak flow inside the drains.

- In India either design guidelines are missing, or **the outlets are too small** to accommodate peak flow. As a result, above-average rainfall produces flooded localities.
- Similarly, by **violating environmental laws** and municipal bye-laws, open spaces, wetlands and floodplains have been mercilessly built over, making cities impermeable and hostile to rainwater.
- Unfortunately, **encroachments are always blamed on the urban poor** who live precariously in low-lying drainage areas because of inadequate social housing.
- After the devastating Chennai floods of 2015, experts pointed out that the biggest encroacher of urban waterways and wetlands was actually the state government which had built runways, bus terminals and IT parks by paving over water bodies.
- Ever since **concretisation** became pivot for urbanisation, rainfall no longer finds its way towards underground or surface water bodies.

Conclusion

- To heal the hydrophobia that has shaped our urban experience, we need to move away from land-centric urbanisation and recognise cities as waterscapes.
- We need to let urban rivers breathe by returning them to their floodplains.
- The entire urban watershed needs to heal, and for that to happen, we need less concrete and more democracy and science at the grassroots.

8. Green Taxonomy

If current patterns are not reversed, global temperatures will likely rise by greater than 3°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100 – this will be a significant breach of the limit of 1.5°C set by the Paris Climate Agreement. The priority of the COP26 summit is to urge nations to be ambitious in updating their 2030 targets and commitments to climate action.

India is the third largest carbon emitter, the second most populated country that is projected to reach its peak population of 1.6 billion by 2048, and one of the fastest growing economies in the world. By adopting a development pathway consistent with the 1.5°C-target amidst its pursuit of becoming a US \$5-trillion economy, India will be pivotal in the global calculus of climate change mitigation. It can motivate its peers to heighten their climate action and set a pioneering example of circumventing the complex trade-offs between environment and growth.

India needs to increase its efficiencies in energy and resource use. This green transformation requires massive investments in the most advanced green technologies and business models, as well as in green infrastructure. This transformation is estimated to require an annual investment of US \$200 billion on green infrastructure alone (or 7–8 percent of GDP), and a climate-smart investment of US \$300 billion.

Guiding Principles for a Green Taxonomy

A well-defined taxonomy will

- Reduce the incidence of information asymmetry,
- Rule out plural interpretations of green finance,
- Minimize the risk of greenwashing
- Provide a transparent understanding of the environmental footprint of economic activities underlying investments.
- Provide the guidance and confidence sought by investors in making environmentally conscious investment decisions
- Provide visibility to capital-starved green sectors, allowing them to attract requisite investments away from renewable energy, which currently accounts for 80 percent of green finance in India.
- It can be the touchstone for Financial Institutions (FIs) and companies in managing and monitoring the environmental quotient of their financial profile while allowing regulators like the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to oversee these entities by mandating disclosures that align with the taxonomy.
- It can be the reference for strengthening SEBI green bond guidelines that currently allow for multiple definitions of “green” investments. It can facilitate standardisation of data collection, reporting, and impact measurement methodology involved in the construction of ESG indices.
- It can also be the government’s barometer for tracking the compatibility of environmental outcomes with the vision of global net-zero, while showing the way to appropriate corrections in the case of deviations.

Principles of a Green Taxonomy

Principle 1: A green taxonomy should be developed in a way that has a multipronged impact on green finance.

Principle 2: The taxonomy should focus on India’s most pressing environmental challenges – climate change mitigation and adaptation, pollution prevention and control, resource efficiency, conservation of natural resources, and ecosystem/biodiversity conservation.

- It can also be the government's barometer for tracking the **compatibility of environmental outcomes with the vision of global net-zero**, while showing the way to appropriate corrections in the case of deviations.
- The taxonomy must include the environmental objectives of climate change mitigation, reducing air and water pollution, addressing water scarcity, and arresting ecosystem/biodiversity losses.
- These are serious challenges in sectors such as energy, manufacturing, transport, agriculture, waste, and buildings. The taxonomy may thus focus on these sectors to maximise the positive environmental outcomes expected to be generated from the taxonomy.
- Include a pre-specified set of sustainable agricultural and livestock farming practices suitable for the Indian context, as opposed to quantitative technical screening criteria.

Principle 3: The taxonomy must be anchored in Nationally Determined Contributions, key national plans and policies for environmental action, and national norms and standards.

- The Indian taxonomy must rely on pollution standards set by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) under the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MOEF&CC); water consumption norms set by the MOEF&CC and Ministry of Jal Shakti; and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) protocol defined by the MOEF&CC.
- The monetary valuation of ecosystem services may also be used for assessing ecosystem and biodiversity losses.

Principle 4: The eligibility criteria must be technology agnostic and 1.5°C-compatible.

- India must establish its own screening criteria for determining eligibility for green finance.
- The Indian version must be technology agnostic. Such taxonomy provides the freedom to choose between alternative pathways to green transition and prevents it from being redundant amidst technological innovations.
- India must use the latest climate science for its technical screening criteria relating to GHG emission thresholds. The criteria should be consistent with 1.5°C, rather than 2°C.

Principle 5: The taxonomy should be harmonised with international standards.

- Existing Indian standards may be revised to be at par with international benchmarks within the scope provided by domestic circumstances.

Principle 6: Alignment of tracking of green finance and disclosure norms with the taxonomy.

- There is a need for tracking climate/green finance through transparent and well-defined disclosures and reporting.
- Regulators such as the RBI and SEBI should mandate financial market participants to delineate the environmental goals met
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs must mandate companies to enlist the environmental objectives achieved by economic activities.

Principle 7: Regular reviews and updates of the taxonomy.

- Timely updates to incorporate changes in development levels, technology, policy, standards and environmental conditions

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding Maulana Abul Kalam Azad:

1. He started a weekly journal in Urdu called Al-Hilal in 1912.
2. He was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, Bharat Ratna in 1992.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
- B 1 and 2
- C 2 only
- D None

Answer : B

Explanation

- Every year, 11th November is celebrated as National education day, which commemorates the birth anniversary of independent India's first education minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, originally named Muhiyuddin Ahmad, was born on 11th November 1888 in Mecca, Saudi-Arabia.
- He was a **proponent of Hindu Muslim unity, opposed to Partition.**

- In **1912**, he started a **weekly journal in Urdu called Al-Hilal** which played an important role in forging Hindu-Muslim unity after the bad blood created between the two communities in the aftermath of **Morley-Minto reforms (1909)**. Hence, **statement 1 is correct**.
- The government regarded Al- Hilal as a propagator of secessionist views and **banned it in 1914**.
- Azad supported the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22) started by Gandhiji and entered the Indian National Congress in 1920.
 - In **1923**, he was **elected as the president of Indian National Congress**. He again became the president of Congress in **1940** and remained in the post till 1946.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, **Bharat Ratna in 1992**. Hence, **statement 3 is correct**.

2. Arrange the following in a chronological order as per their annexation by the Doctrine of Lapse?

1. Satara
2. Sambalpur
3. Udaipur
4. Jhansi
5. Jaitpur
6. Nagpur
7. Baghat

Options:

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- b. 1, 5, 2, 7, 3, 4, 6
- c. 2, 7, 6, 4, 1, 5, 3
- d. 7, 6, 5, 1, 2, 4, 3

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The doctrine of lapse was a policy of annexation initiated by the East India Company in the Indian subcontinent against the princely states.
- The policy is most commonly associated with Lord Dalhousie, who was the Governor General of the East India Company in India between 1848 and 1856.

- According to the doctrine, any Indian princely state under the suzerainty of the East India Company (EIC) (the dominant imperial power in the Indian subsidiary system), would have its princely status abolished (and therefore be annexed into British India) if the ruler was either “manifestly incompetent or died without a male heir”. The doctrine and its applications were widely regarded as illegitimate by many Indians, leading to resentment against the EIC

3. Parliamentary privileges are enjoyed by which of the following:

1. Members of Lok Sabha
2. Members of Rajya Sabha
3. President of India
4. Attorney General of India
5. Committees of the Parliamentary Houses

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 1, 2, and 5
- B 1, 2, 3 and 5
- C 1, 2, 4 and 5
- D 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer : C

Explanation

- **Parliamentary Privileges** are special rights, immunities and exemptions **enjoyed by the two Houses of Parliament, their committees and their members.**
- The Constitution also **extends the parliamentary privileges** to those persons who are entitled to speak and take part in the proceedings of a House of Parliament or any of its committees. These **include the Attorney General of India** and Union ministers.
- The **parliamentary privileges do not extend to the President** of India, who is also an integral part of the Parliament. Article 361 of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.
- Article 105 of the Constitution expressly mentions two privileges, that is, freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.

- Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.
- Hence, option C is correct.

4. With respect to Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is the highest sporting honour of India.
2. The Khel Ratna award was instituted in 1991-1992
3. The first recipient was Chess legend Viswanathan Anand.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Khel Ratna Award, officially known as the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, formerly known as the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award in Sports and Games, is the highest sporting honour of India.
- It is awarded annually by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- The recipient(s) is/are honoured for their “spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports over a period of four years” at international level.
- The award was first instituted in 1991-1992 and the the first recipient of the award was Chess Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand, who was honoured for the performance in the year 1991-92.

5. With reference to the Locusts, consider the following statements:

1. Climate change is a factor of increased breeding of Locusts.
2. Locust portrays a threat to food security.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation

- The **desert locust** (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a short-horned grasshopper.
 - Harmless when solitary, locusts undergo a **behavioural change** when their population builds up rapidly.
 - They enter the '**gregarious phase**' by forming huge swarms that can travel up to 150 km per day, eating up every bit of greenery on their way.
- **Effect of Climate Change:** Change in cyclonic patterns over the Arabian Sea is behind the locust invasions in east Africa, west and south Asia, in 2020.
 - Unusual rainfall in Iran helped in their breeding.
 - Locusts are known to be passive flyers and generally follow the wind.
 - Their movement has been aided by westerly winds, which were further strengthened by the low-pressure area created by **Cyclone Amphan** (2019) in the Bay of Bengal.
 - **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Locust infestations can harm livelihoods and be a threat to regional investments in ensuring food security. **Hence statement 2 is correct.**

6. With reference to a grouping of countries known as BRICS, consider the following statements:

1. The First Summit of BRICS was held in Rio de Janeiro in 2009.
2. South Africa was the last to join the BRICS grouping.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The First Summit of BRICS was held in Yekaterinburg in Russia in 2009.
- South Africa was the last to join the BRICS grouping.
- BRICS is the acronym coined to associate five major emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- South Africa was invited to join the bloc (BRIC) in December 2010, resulting in BRICS.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. ISRO's role has been impeccable in making India a global space power, however, there are many challenges and opportunities in the new space age that ISRO needs to address. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly mention about ISRO's role in making India a global space power.
- Explain 'new space age' and mention the challenges and opportunities for ISRO.
- Conclude by mentioning the need for regulation in space sector.

2Q. Highlight the socio-political conditions of the Sangam period with special mention of three literary assemblies. (250 words)

Approach

- Mention about the time period of Sangam age and the literary assemblies held during that period.
- Explain the socio-political conditions including Sangam polity, administration, society, the position of women, religion, etc.

- Conclude by mentioning about the decline of Sangam period.

