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1. High-Powered Task Force on Examination Reforms

(GS Paper II – Governance | Education | E-Governance | Government Policies & Interventions)

Why in News?

The Union Government has constituted a High-Powered Task Force, chaired by Nandan Nilekani, to recommend comprehensive reforms for making India's examination system leak-proof, transparent, and technology-driven following recurring incidents of examination paper leaks and malpractices.

Background

- The initiative comes in response to repeated instances of paper leaks and examination irregularities, particularly in national-level entrance and recruitment examinations.
- It aims to restore public confidence by enhancing the credibility, security, transparency, and integrity of India's examination ecosystem.

Key Highlights

- The Task Force will recommend measures to strengthen the National Testing Agency (NTA) and improve the conduct of public examinations.
- It comprises experts from technology, education, internal security, logistics, and public administration, including Nandan Nilekani, S. Somanath, V. Kamakoti, Tapan Deka, Anita Karwal, and Amrit Lal Meena.
- The panel will focus on AI-enabled monitoring, encrypted question paper transmission, biometric authentication, real-time surveillance, cybersecurity protocols, and robust data protection to prevent examination malpractices.
- The Government has announced the implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, along with fast-track investigation and prosecution of examination-related offences.

Significance

- Strengthens the credibility, fairness, and integrity of competitive examinations.
- Promotes technology-driven governance and enhances public trust in recruitment and admission processes.
- Supports the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 by fostering transparent, efficient, and technology-enabled assessment systems.
- Reinforces the principles of good governance—transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen-centric service delivery.

Challenges

- Ensuring robust cybersecurity and protection of candidates' data.
- Achieving uniform implementation across examination agencies and States.
- Addressing the digital divide while ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.
- Countering increasingly sophisticated methods of organised examination fraud.

Way Forward

- Develop a secure end-to-end digital examination ecosystem with periodic third-party security audits.
- Strengthen coordination among the Centre, States, NTA, law enforcement agencies, and cybersecurity experts.
- Introduce risk-based monitoring, AI-driven anomaly detection, and regular capacity building of examination authorities.
- Ensure effective implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 to deter organised examination fraud and safeguard examination integrity.

2. India's China Policy amid Changing Global Geopolitics

(GS Paper II – International Relations | India and its Neighbourhood | Bilateral Relations)

Why in News?

Recent geopolitical developments, including evolving U.S. foreign policy and renewed discussions on India's economic engagement with China, have reignited debates on balancing strategic autonomy, economic interests, and national security in India's China policy.

Key Highlights

- Since the Galwan Valley clashes (2020), India has adopted a cautious approach towards China by tightening scrutiny of Chinese investments, restricting certain digital platforms, and promoting supply-chain diversification.
- Despite these measures, China remains one of India's largest trading partners, with significant dependence on industrial inputs, electronics, active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), and critical minerals.
- Persistent concerns include the unresolved Line of Actual Control (LAC) dispute, China's close strategic partnership with Pakistan, widening trade imbalance, and risks arising from economic coercion and dependence on critical technologies.
- China has also opposed India's aspirations for permanent membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), while continuing to deepen its strategic partnership with Pakistan.

- The evolving global order underscores the need for India to pursue strategic autonomy, avoiding excessive dependence on any single major power while safeguarding its national interests.

Significance

- Enables India to balance economic growth with national security.
- Promotes resilient supply chains, domestic manufacturing, and technological self-reliance under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Enhances India's credibility as a responsible stakeholder pursuing multi-alignment and strategic autonomy in an emerging multipolar world order.
- Strengthens India's long-term economic resilience and strategic decision-making capacity.

Challenges

- Managing economic dependence while safeguarding national security.
- Reducing vulnerabilities in critical supply chains and emerging technologies.
- Addressing the widening trade deficit with China.
- Maintaining strategic autonomy amid intensifying U.S.–China geopolitical rivalry.

Way Forward

- Pursue calibrated engagement by separating economic cooperation from core security concerns.
- Accelerate supply-chain diversification and domestic manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme.
- Deepen partnerships with trusted economies through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), Quad, and mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- Continue diplomatic dialogue while ensuring peace and tranquillity along the LAC, with national security remaining the cornerstone of bilateral engagement.

3. India's Defence Indigenisation and Expanding Defence Exports

(GS Paper III – Defence & Internal Security | Indigenisation of Technology | Defence Production)

Why in News?

India has witnessed significant progress in indigenous defence manufacturing, missile development, naval modernisation, and defence exports, reinforcing its vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and emerging as a reliable global defence partner.

Key Highlights

- India continues to strengthen Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence by promoting indigenous design, development, and manufacturing of advanced defence platforms.
- INS Mahendragiri, a Project 17A stealth frigate, has been designed and built in India with over 75% indigenous content, enhancing the Indian Navy's maritime capabilities.
- The DRDO successfully tested the Pinaka Long-Range Guided Rocket and Project Kusha air defence missile system, strengthening India's indigenous long-range precision strike and multi-layered air defence capabilities.
- India is leveraging defence diplomacy through strategic defence cooperation with friendly nations, including agreements involving BrahMos missile exports and other indigenous defence systems.
- Government initiatives such as the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020, Positive Indigenisation Lists, Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), and enhanced FDI norms have accelerated indigenous defence production and innovation.
- India's defence exports have expanded significantly in recent years, reflecting growing global confidence in the country's defence technology and manufacturing ecosystem.

Significance

- Enhances self-reliance in critical defence technologies and reduces dependence on imports.
- Strengthens national security through indigenous research, innovation, and advanced military capabilities.
- Promotes defence exports, strategic partnerships, and India's role as a reliable defence partner in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.
- Contributes to foreign exchange earnings, strengthens the domestic defence manufacturing ecosystem, and supports India's aspiration to become a global defence manufacturing hub.
- Reinforces strategic autonomy by reducing external vulnerabilities in critical defence technologies.

Challenges

- Dependence on imports for critical technologies such as aero-engines, advanced sensors, and semiconductor-based defence electronics.
- Bridging technology gaps in next-generation defence systems.
- Enhancing private sector participation and strengthening collaboration between the public and private sectors.
- Expanding defence export markets amid intense global competition and evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Way Forward

- Accelerate indigenous R&D through greater collaboration among DRDO, academia, start-ups, and private industry.
- Strengthen defence manufacturing under Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.
- Increase investment in advanced defence technologies, including artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, space capabilities, hypersonic systems, electronic warfare, and unmanned platforms.
- Expand defence exports through strategic partnerships, joint production, technology transfer, and co-development with friendly countries.
- Foster a globally competitive defence ecosystem through continuous innovation, skilled workforce development, and policy support.

4. RBI's Monetary Policy and External Sector Resilience

(GS Paper III – Indian Economy | Monetary Policy | Inflation | External Sector | Banking)

Why in News?

Recent RBI measures to attract foreign capital and the Governor's remarks on inflation, exchange rate management, and capital inflows have reaffirmed the central bank's focus on price stability, financial stability, and external sector resilience amid an uncertain global economic environment.

Key Highlights

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reiterated that inflation control and price stability remain its primary mandate, with monetary policy decisions continuing to follow a data-dependent approach through the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).
- RBI's recent measures have attracted substantial foreign capital through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] deposits and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs), strengthening India's external financing position.
- The capital inflows are expected to strengthen India's external sector by supporting the Balance of Payments (BoP), augmenting foreign exchange reserves, and improving resilience against global financial volatility.
- The RBI has reaffirmed that it does not target any specific exchange rate for the rupee but intervenes in the foreign exchange market only to contain excessive volatility and ensure orderly market conditions.
- The central bank remains committed to balancing price stability with sustainable economic growth while safeguarding financial and external sector stability.

Significance

- Maintains macroeconomic stability by keeping inflation under control and anchoring inflation expectations.
- Strengthens investor confidence and enhances the resilience of India's external sector amid volatile global capital flows.
- Supports sustainable economic growth while preserving financial and currency stability.
- Reinforces the credibility and independence of India's Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework.
- Supports exchange rate stability and enhances confidence among global investors and credit rating agencies.

Challenges

- Managing the growth-inflation trade-off amid global economic uncertainty.
- Addressing risks from volatile capital flows, geopolitical tensions, and imported inflation.
- Ensuring exchange rate stability without distorting market mechanisms.
- Managing liquidity arising from large foreign capital inflows while ensuring effective monetary policy transmission.

Way Forward

- Continue a Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) approach supported by data-driven monetary policy.
- Strengthen external sector resilience through adequate foreign exchange reserves, diversified capital inflows, and prudent exchange rate management.
- Enhance macroeconomic stability through close coordination between monetary and fiscal policies.
- Deepen domestic financial markets and strengthen macroeconomic fundamentals to reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

5. Developing a Safe and Effective Dengue Vaccine: Challenges and Way Forward

(GS Paper II – Health | GS Paper III – Science & Technology | Biotechnology)

Why in News?

Recent scientific studies and expert discussions on dengue vaccines have highlighted the challenges of ensuring uniform protection against all four dengue virus serotypes, while minimising the risk of Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE) and ensuring long-term vaccine safety.

Key Highlights

- Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral disease caused by four distinct serotypes—DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, and DENV-4. Infection with one serotype provides long-term immunity only against that serotype and not against the others.
- A subsequent infection with a different serotype may trigger Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE), a phenomenon in which pre-existing antibodies facilitate viral entry into host cells, increasing the risk of severe dengue.
- Therefore, an ideal dengue vaccine must be tetravalent, providing balanced and sustained protection against all four serotypes to minimise the risk of ADE.
- Clinical studies indicate that vaccine efficacy may vary across different serotypes and depending on an individual's prior dengue exposure, underscoring the need for continuous evaluation of vaccine safety and effectiveness.
- India bears one of the world's highest dengue burdens, making the development of a safe, effective, and affordable dengue vaccine a critical public health priority.

Significance

- A safe and effective dengue vaccine can substantially reduce disease burden, hospitalisations, and mortality, particularly in dengue-endemic countries like India.
- It complements vector control, early diagnosis, disease surveillance, and public awareness as part of an integrated dengue prevention strategy.
- Advances in dengue vaccinology contribute to broader progress in immunology, biotechnology, and pandemic preparedness.
- Supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 – Good Health and Well-being by reducing the burden of vector-borne diseases.

Challenges

- Developing a vaccine that provides uniform and durable protection against all four dengue virus serotypes.
- Managing the risk of Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE), particularly in individuals with varying levels of prior dengue exposure.
- Genetic diversity and changing circulation patterns of dengue serotypes complicate long-term vaccine effectiveness.
- Limited long-term efficacy and safety data across different age groups and populations necessitate continuous post-marketing surveillance.

Way Forward

- Strengthen research and innovation to develop safe tetravalent vaccines with sustained efficacy across all dengue serotypes.
- Enhance disease surveillance, genomic monitoring, and evidence-based vaccination policies to support informed public health decision-making.

- Strengthen integrated vector management, including mosquito surveillance, environmental sanitation, and community participation, alongside vaccination.
- Promote international collaboration in vaccine research, clinical trials, and data sharing to accelerate the development of next-generation dengue vaccines.