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Headlines:

- 1 India's Evolving Role in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict
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1. India's Evolving Role in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

GS Paper II – International Relations | India & Major Powers | Global Peace & Security

Why in News?

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that India is going “beyond advocacy” in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- India is engaging with both Moscow and Kyiv on Black Sea maritime safety, grain exports, energy exports and possibilities of non-attack arrangements.

India's Evolving Diplomatic Role

- **From advocacy to facilitation:** India is moving beyond its repeated calls for dialogue and diplomacy towards facilitating communication on specific issues.
- **Potential bridge-builder:** Simultaneous engagement with both sides gives India diplomatic space to contribute to conflict de-escalation.
- **Issue-based diplomacy:** India is focusing on practical concerns involving food, energy and maritime security, rather than taking sides.

Strategic Autonomy & India-Russia Ties

- India maintains its time-tested strategic partnership with Russia, including historical support from the Soviet Union during the 1971 India-Pakistan War.
- Continued Russian oil purchases highlight India's emphasis on energy security and strategic autonomy.
- At the same time, India must balance its Russia ties with its growing strategic partnership with the US and Europe.

Wider Global Significance

- **Food security:** Disruptions to Black Sea grain exports affect global food supplies.
- **Energy security:** The conflict influences global oil and gas markets.
- **Maritime security:** Safe navigation in the Black Sea is crucial for international trade.
- **Multipolarity:** India's engagement reflects its aspiration to contribute to a more balanced and multipolar global order.

Challenges

- Maintaining trust with both Russia and Ukraine.
- Balancing relations with Russia and Western partners.
- Avoiding the perception of assuming the role of a formal mediator without a mutually accepted mandate.

Way Forward

- Continue quiet diplomacy and back-channel communication.
- Promote humanitarian, food and energy-security initiatives.
- Leverage G20, BRICS, SCO and UN platforms to encourage dialogue and de-escalation.
- Strengthen India's role as a voice of the Global South and a responsible stakeholder in global peace.

2. Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls: Electoral Integrity vs Inclusion

GS Paper II – Polity & Governance | Constitutional Bodies | Electoral Reforms

Why in News?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has undertaken Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, triggering debate over voter inclusion, procedural safeguards and the ECI's constitutional powers.
- The issue highlights the need to balance electoral-roll purification with protection against wrongful exclusion of eligible voters.

Constitutional & Legal Framework

- **Article 324:** Vests the ECI with superintendence, direction and control over elections.
- **Article 326:** Provides for elections based on universal adult suffrage, subject to constitutional and legal disqualifications.
- **Section 21, Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Provides for preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960:** Provides the procedural framework for revision of electoral rolls.
- **SIR:** The ECI has relied on Article 324 read with the statutory framework governing electoral rolls to undertake intensive verification.

Key Concerns

- **Voter inclusion:** Extensive verification may inadvertently exclude genuine voters facing documentation or procedural difficulties.
- **Due process:** Adequate notice, opportunity to file claims/objections and accessible appeals are essential.
- **ECI accountability:** The controversy has renewed debate on the autonomy, transparency and internal decision-making of the Commission.
- **Electoral integrity:** Removing dead, duplicate, shifted or otherwise ineligible entries is necessary for credible elections.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, uniform and legally grounded procedures.
- Provide adequate time and accessible mechanisms for claims, objections and appeals.
- Use technology for verification while retaining human oversight and offline alternatives.
- Strengthen institutional safeguards to preserve both ECI independence and accountability.

3. Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025: Reforming Higher Education Regulation

GS Paper II – Education | Governance | Regulatory Bodies | Institutional Autonomy

Why in News?

- The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 seeks to overhaul India's higher-education regulatory architecture.
- Introduced in Parliament in December 2025, the Bill is under examination by a Joint Parliamentary Committee.
- It proposes subsuming the regulatory functions of UGC, AICTE and NCTE within a unified framework.

Key Provisions

- Establishes a Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Commission.
- Three proposed councils focus on:
 - Regulation – institutional regulation and compliance.
 - Standards – academic and institutional standards.
 - Accreditation – assessment and accreditation.
- Funding functions are kept separate from the proposed regulatory structure.
- Seeks to promote “light but tight” regulation and outcome-oriented governance.

Rationale

- **Simplification:** Reduce fragmentation among multiple regulators.
- **Quality assurance:** Establish clearer standards and accountability.
- **Transparency:** Greater emphasis on disclosure and institutional performance.
- **NEP 2020:** Seeks to advance the vision of separating regulation, standards, accreditation and funding.

Key Concerns

- **Institutional autonomy:** Excessive standardisation may constrain curriculum, research and innovation.

- **Compliance burden:** Regulation could encourage a paperwork-driven culture rather than genuine academic improvement.
- **Federalism:** Greater central regulatory control may affect the autonomy of State universities.
- **Academic freedom:** Prescriptive regulation should not undermine intellectual diversity.
- **Institutions of national importance:** Concerns exist regarding implications for the autonomy of IITs, IIMs and IISc.
- **Regulatory accountability:** The powers, composition and independence of the proposed regulatory architecture require careful institutional safeguards.

Way Forward

- Adopt outcome-based and risk-based regulation rather than excessive process compliance.
- Ensure autonomy with accountability.
- Reduce duplication and regulatory burden.
- Provide meaningful participation of States, academics and HEIs in regulatory decision-making.

4. Sixth Positive Indigenisation List: Strengthening Defence Self-Reliance

GS Paper III – Defence & Security | Defence Manufacturing | Indigenisation | Strategic Autonomy

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Defence has reviewed the proposed sixth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL), which is in the final stages of approval.
- It is expected to primarily include strategically important equipment for the Indian Navy and Army, including Line Replaceable Units (LRUs), sub-systems, assemblies and other equipment.

What is Positive Indigenisation?

- PILs progressively restrict the import of specified defence items and mandate their procurement from Indian industry after the prescribed indigenisation timeline.
- They seek to promote Atmanirbhar Bharat, domestic manufacturing and technological capability in defence.

Progress So Far

- The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) has promulgated five PILs covering 509 major items between August 2020 and October 2023.
- Of these, 191 items worth about ₹3.40 lakh crore have been contracted, while 114 items worth ₹4.75 lakh crore have received Acceptance of Necessity (AoN). The remaining 204 items, valued at ₹5.41 lakh crore, are at various development stages.
- These DMA lists are distinct from the Department of Defence Production (DDP) lists, which cover 5,417 items through six lists.

Strategic Significance

- **Strategic autonomy:** Reduces vulnerability to foreign supply disruptions.
- **Operational readiness:** Ensures greater availability of critical components during geopolitical crises.
- **Industrial ecosystem:** Creates opportunities for Indian private firms, MSMEs and start-ups.
- **Technology & innovation:** Encourages indigenous R&D and advanced defence capabilities.
- **Economic gains:** Supports manufacturing, skilled employment and, indirectly, defence-export potential.

Key Challenges

- Critical technologies and specialised components may still require foreign inputs.
- Indigenous systems must meet global benchmarks of quality, reliability, interoperability and cost-effectiveness.
- Sustained coordination among the Armed Forces, DRDO and domestic industry is essential.

Way Forward

- Strengthen industry–DRDO–academia collaboration, technology transfer and long-term procurement visibility.
- Make indigenisation capability-driven rather than merely import-substitution driven.

5. SIR of Electoral Rolls: Universal Suffrage and Due Process

GS Paper II – Polity & Governance | Constitutional Bodies | Electoral Reforms | Fundamental Rights

Why in News?

- Supreme Court judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyan emphasised that mass disenfranchisement could undermine the constitutional principles of equality and universal adult suffrage.
- His remarks came amid the ongoing debate over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before law and protection against arbitrary State action.
- **Article 326:** Provides for elections based on universal adult suffrage, subject to legally prescribed disqualifications.
- **Article 324:** Entrusts the ECI with superintendence, direction and control of elections; its powers operate within the Constitution and applicable laws.
- Electoral-roll preparation and revision are governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

Key Constitutional Concerns

- **Electoral integrity:** Revision can help remove dead, duplicate, shifted and ineligible entries, improving roll accuracy.
- **Electoral inclusion:** Genuine eligible voters must not be arbitrarily excluded through procedural or documentation barriers.
- **Due process:** Adequate notice, opportunity to respond and effective claims/appeals mechanisms are essential safeguards.
- **Equality:** Large-scale exclusion without adequate procedural safeguards can raise concerns under Article 14.
- **Democratic participation:** Universal adult suffrage ensures political participation irrespective of wealth, education, social status, religion or gender.

Right to Vote: Important Nuance

- The right to vote is generally recognised as a statutory/legal right, governed by electoral laws.
- However, universal adult suffrage under Article 326 has constitutional status, making voter inclusion an important constitutional-democratic principle.
- The observation linking franchise with the Basic Structure is significant but should be treated as a judicial observation, rather than an unqualified settled proposition.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, evidence-based and legally grounded electoral-roll revision.
- Provide accessible notice, claims, objections and appeals.
- Balance electoral-roll purification with maximum voter inclusion.

A credible electoral system requires both accurate electoral rolls and robust safeguards against wrongful disenfranchisement.

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