



CHROME IAS

Giving Wings To Your Dreams !!!

EDITORIALS

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Fortifying the Africa outreach

GS2 (International Relations)

830 words summarized to 180

Recently, Indian dignitaries began their respective visits to Africa.

Economic links with Africa

- In 2015, India agreed to provide credit worth \$10 billion.
- By 2017, India had cumulatively extended 152 Lines of Credit .
- India has provided free access to its market for the exports..
- India was ranked the third largest trading partner of Africa..

Issues in India-Africa relations

- India's economic relation with Africa dwarfed by China.
- Disconnect between Indian developmental assistance economic engagement.
- India's developmental footprint in Africa does not produce commensurate empathy.
- India's aid being unconditional, the recipients often take it as an entitlement.

Way forward

- Need to take direct control of our development programme instead of handing our funds to intermediaries such as the African Union.
- India's development assistance should prefer the countries with its substantial interests.
- Prefer aiding countries which are willing to help us.
- The aided project selected should be compatible with local requirements.
- For greater transparency, India should prefer its public sector to implement the aid projects.

Conclusion

India's aid to Africa should be reciprocated by acknowledgement and quid pro quo in terms of goodwill and institutional preference.

Is banning cryptocurrencies the solution?

GS 3 (Economy)

1800 words summarized to 250

Recently, the Garg panel has called for a complete ban on private cryptocurrencies in India.

Recommendations of the Garg panel

- Fine of up to ₹25 crore and a jail term of up to 10 years for owning or handling private cryptocurrencies.
- Introduction of a single cryptocurrency for the whole country backed by RBI

Reasons to ban cryptocurrency

- volatility of private cryptocurrencies
- not backed by a sovereign government
- due to anonymity, they can be used to finance criminal activities.

Should crypto currency be banned?

- if cryptocurrencies are volatile, so are many other asset classes
- Banning will lead to formation of underground market.
- It is not essential that a currency needs to be backed by an institution
- monetary policy doesn't face any threat from cryptocurrencies

Cryptocurrency vs blockchain

The cryptocurrency is just one application of the underlying blockchain technology.

The EU regulations on cryptocurrency

- The EU is putting in regulations called AMLD-5 to tackle money laundering.
- It is a bunch of norms to make crypto transactions more secure.

Should govts issue cryptocurrency?

- It would create a lot of problems in the form of contradictions in existing regulations.
- A digital currency issued by the RBI that gets misused by criminals can affect trust in the existing fiat currency protocol.

Way forward

- Whether to invest in an asset or not should be left to the investor.

- Govt can come up with a regulatory framework.
- For exploration of the blockchain technology, cryptocurrencies should be allowed to operate.

Conclusion

Regulations on cryptocurrencies could be the best way to go forward rather than putting a blanket ban.

Great expectations

GS 2 (Health)

The Lok Sabha has recently passed the Surrogacy Bill, 2019.

Surrogacy in India

- Violations of human rights of underprivileged woman.
- Plethora of unregulated assisted reproductive techniques (ART) clinics
- growing domestic demand for surrogacy services.

The Surrogacy Bill provisions

- surrogate mother can only be a close relative
- payment to the surrogate for medical expenses and insurance
- exploiting the surrogate would attract imprisonment and fine
- advertising for surrogacy will also attract the same punishment.
- registration of surrogacy clinics
- regulatory boards to ensure compliance with the law

The concern with the Surrogacy Bill

- Lack of specifics in definitions, for example 'close relative'
- Exclusion of various groups of people from access to surrogacy; and
- Seeks to regulate surrogacy before setting the ART house in order.

Way forward

Govt needs to first set up a regulatory framework for ART clinics, which provide the basic technology for surrogacy.

Conclusion

The Surrogacy law has the possibility of revolutionising the surrogacy sector.

A law for those who testify

GS 2 (Polity & Governance)

600 words summarized to 200

Why has this issue cropped up?

The Centre is yet to act on a Supreme Court directive to legislate on witness protection.

Recent instances of attacks on witnesses

- witnesses of a rape survivor died in 'accident' in UP.
- A police official assigned to protect murder witness was killed.
- In Asaram Bapu case three witnesses were killed several attacked.

Supreme Court directive

- It issued directions to frame laws for protection of witnesses.
- Following this, Maharashtra came out with a witness protection act.
- However, the Centre, and most other States, are yet to act.

Witness Protection Scheme

- Witness Protection Scheme was drafted by the Centre last year on directives of Supreme Court.
- However, the scheme was meant to be a measure in force only till the government brought out its own law on the issue.

Lax implementation

- Implementation of the Witness Protection Scheme on the ground leaves much to be desired.
- It is silent on the punishment to be given to policemen charged with providing security who threaten the witnesses.

Police-politician nexus

- Criminals get support from the police.
- Policeman, for his career progression, does not take any action against political 'master'.

Way forward

The Witness Protection Scheme calls for more elaborate and stricter laws to be incorporated.

Conclusion

Legislation for witness protection is a must for India's criminal justice system.

Something special

GS 2 (International Relations)

450 words summarized to 150

Why has this issue cropped up?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited Bhutan.

India-Bhutan relationship features

- traditional closeness
- Open borders
- Consultation on foreign policy
- Regular communications on strategic issues
- Bhutan's unequivocal support to India on strategic issues
- Bhutan opposing threats to India; for instance, ULFA issue, Doklam issue.
- India's assistance to Bhutan's economy,
- India's assistance to Bhutan's hydropower generation

Caution needed

- Relationship with Bhutan cannot be taken for granted
- Ties came under a strain over India's sudden change in its power purchasing policy
- Bhutan's worry that too much trade, transport and tourism from India could put its environment at risk.
- India's plans for a Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) have been held up.
- Bhutanese proposal to levy entry charges on Indian tourists could cause differences with India.
- Bhutanese have shown a preference for education destinations other than India

Way forward

India will have to remain alert to strategic powers which are courting Bhutan assiduously.

Conclusion

It remains in India's and Bhutan's best interests to make each other's concerns a top priority.

Soldier Number One

GS 3 (Security)

500 words summarized to 150

Why has this issue cropped up?

The creation of the post of the Chief of the Defence Staff(CDS) has been announced.

What made formation of CDS urgent?

- Pulwama and Balakot events,
- Repeated offers for mediation in Kashmir by the U.S.
- Imminent pull-out of American troops from Afghanistan
- The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A

The origin of the CDS

- During Kargil war, there were several lapses on the part of Army.
- Further, there was a lack of coordination between Army and Air Force
- Thus, the Kargil Review Committee strongly recommended setting up the CDS.

How would CDS help?

- Bridge gaps between forces and reduce response time.
- Will keep the Defence Minister fully briefed and effectively advised.
- It will be part of the Cabinet Committee on Security Affairs.
- It will act as a better link the three services.
- It will certainly casue forces to act more efficiently.

Conclusion

The government should use the opportunity to ramp up the intelligence apparatus that is concomitant to this office.

It takes many

GS 2 (International institutions)
1200 words summarized to 250

Why has this issue cropped up?

US has blamed India and China of misusing the developing country tag at WTO and threatened to leave it..

Is WTO worth saving?

One way to evaluate the question is to investigate its achievements.

- Overall trade in goods has nearly quadrupled since 1995.
- WTO members' import tariffs have declined by an average of 15 per cent.
- Over half of world trade is now tariff-free.
- Growth in trade has led to improved standards of living.
- Today, the WTO regulates more than 98 per cent of global trade.
- It has avoided trade wars at \$340 billion per year.

Unilateralism and WTO

- A unilateral finding of unfair trading practices and subsequent action by the US places other countries on higher moral ground.
- Unilateral measures are prohibited by Article 23 of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU).
- US claims that it is using its power to discipline the trading system for the benefit of all. However, there is no justification for subverting the multilateral process. .

Multilateralism and WTO

- Multilateral process needs to be fortified and it cannot happen until the strongest member is vested in it.
- Multilateralism implies that every country agrees to bind itself to the same rules as other (smaller) countries.
- Multilateralism does make trade much more complex as to generate consensus is very hard.
- However, multilateral agreement is still the best, and solutions can be found.
- In the absence of pure multilateral negotiations, interested members could negotiate plurilaterally.

Conclusion

The WTO may still emerge as the lynchpin of global trade governance.

What India has to offer in the Gulf

GS 2 (International Relations)

900 words summarized to 150

Why has this issue cropped up?

Prime Minister recently visited to United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

India's new vision towards Gulf

- Before 2015, no prime minister of India had travelled to UAE for more than three decades.
- India has shed the tendency to see Gulf region through the prism of Pakistan.

Gulf's new approach to India

- Some Gulf countries have expanded counter-terror cooperation with Delhi.
- Gulf kingdoms have begun to address many of the long-standing Indian concerns regarding the diaspora.
- Oil rich Gulf has begun to see India as a major economic partner.
- PM Modi has been honoured with the Zayed Medal, the highest civilian honour in the UAE.

Way forward for India

- India should now put emphasis on what it can do for the Gulf.
- It should offer strong support to moderate Islam reform in the Gulf region.
- It should unclog bureaucratic and policy obstacles to investments from the Gulf.
- It should take initiative to develop a more pro-active strategy for defence cooperation in the region.

Conclusion

The question for India is no longer about taking sides; it is about contributing to the regional security in whatever manner it can.

Bad Prescription

Category: GS 2 (Health)

600 words summarized to 100

Why has this issue cropped up ?

The National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2019 has been passed by the Parliament.

Issues with the NMC Act

- The nomination of important functionaries of the NMC will rest exclusively with the Centre.
- Creation of a cadre of Community Health Providers will promote quackery.
- National Exit Test (NEXT) to evaluate an MBBS student through MCQs is not a good idea.
- The Act appears to heavily favour private medical colleges.

Conclusion

The NMC Act fails to incorporate a culture of democratic practice in the medical field.

Code Red for labour

Category: GS 3 (Welfare)

500 words summarized to 100

Why has this issue cropped up?

The Centre has proposed to replace 44 labour laws with four codes.

Antithetical to protection of labour

- Proposal to fix the national minimum floor wage at ₹178.
- 95% of the workforce employed in informal units excluded.
- Ambiguity maintained on wording and definitions..
- ‘Apprentices’ be no longer considered employees.
- A provision on “employees below fifteen years of age”,
- The code promotes further contractualisation of labour.
- Brings back the draconian provision of “recoverable advances”.
- Provisions of increased overtime work have been inserted.
- Ample alibis to employers to evade bonus payments.
- Non-payment of wages will now not be a criminal offence.
- Restrictions, on forming or registering unions, calling a strike, etc.

Conclusion

The proposed laws resemble 'employer codes' rather than 'labour law'.

Rooting AI in ethics

Category: GS 4 (Ethics)

750 words summarized to 150

A technology should be evaluated both on the basis of its utility and the intention of its creator.

The flawed facial recognition system

- Most commercially available AI systems are optimised using the teleological perspectives and not the deontological perspective.
- An AI system in the U.S. failed to recognise faces of African Americans with the same accuracy as those of Caucasian Americans.
- From a teleological perspective, this flawed AI system gets a go ahead.
- From a deontological perspective, it should have been rejected as its intention probably was not to identify people from all races.

High risks

- These systems are increasingly being used for law enforcement.
- Implications of being labelled a threat to public safety just because of low accuracy of the system are huge.

Biased data

- The bias is in the data used to train the algorithm.
- It stems from our own flawed historical and cultural perspectives..

Way forward .

- An ethical basis resting on both teleological and deontological perspectives gives us more faith in a system.
- Understanding and discussing the ethical basis of AI is important for India as the transformative capability of AI in India is huge.

Conclusion

Any institutional framework for AI should have an explicit focus on the ethical basis.

Deliberate, don't disrupt

Category: GS 2 (Polity)

400 words summarized to 100

Disruption

- Lawmakers often take to organised disruption of legislative business
- Some bills have taken long time to be enacted or were not enacted.
- Many sessions of Parliament saw little business being done due to disruption.

Parliamentary Committees

- Useful in expert discussion over laws.
- Facilitated enhanced cross-party coordination over issues.
- Their importance have been undermined over the last few years.
- In 16th Lok Sabha, only a fourth of all bills referred to committees.

Parliamentary Debates

Time spent on debates in the current session was barely a third of the overall business.

Way forward

- Code of conduct for legislators.
- Proper utilization of Parliamentary Committees
- More time allocation on debates

Conclusion

Deliberation is an important component of parliamentary democracy apart from legislation.

Increasing investment to stimulate growth

Category: GS 3 (Economy)

900 words summarized to 150

Reasons for India's current economic slowdown

India's current economic slowdown is due to a combination of two underlying trends.

- short-run cyclical slowdown
- long-term fall in investment and savings rates.

The economy data

- Significant fall in Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) since 2011-12.
- Significant fall in the household sector's investment rate till 2015-16.
- Private sector investment rate showed only little fall after 2015-16.
- Public sector investment rate fell only little after 2015-16.
- Significant fall in Gross Domestic Savings Rate after 2011-12

Way forward

- A countercyclical policy should increase growth rate to its current potential of 7%-7.5%.
- Next, structural reforms should raise the potential growth itself to above 8.5%.
- Fiscal stimulus, in the form of additional public sector investment, may prove to be more effective.
- Central & State governments and non-government public sector enterprises should increase capital expenditures.
- Financial system must be activated to lend more.
- Re-look at the FRBM Act is needed.

Conclusion

Raising growth requires that attention be paid to both cyclical and structural dimensions of the problem.

Taking a 'Far East' turn

Category: GS 2 (International Relations)
900 words summarized to 300

Introduction

PM Modi is to visit Vladivostok, Russia.

Special importance of Vladivostok

When the U.S. and British Navies tried to threaten Indian security during the India-Pakistan war in 1971, the Soviet Union dispatched nuclear-armed flotilla from Vladivostok in support of India.

The Far East of Russia

- The Far East lies is less developed than the country's European areas.
- Putin is inviting foreign countries to invest in this region.

Russia's outreach to Asia

- Russian outreach to Asian nations gained momentum after Crimea crisis spoiled its relations with the West.
- At the same time, the idea of an 'Indo-Pacific region' has also left Russia concerned.
- Russia is apprehensive that it could lose India India, a friendly country and one of the biggest buyers of Russian military hardware.

India-Russia relations improving

- India has maintained that Indo-Pacific is not targeted against any country.
- Two countries are now working for a multipolar Indo-Pacific.
- India has convinced Russia that its engagement with U.S. is not against Russian interests.
- Russia also doesn't want China to become a hegemon and is hence deepening cooperation with countries like India.
- Indian States are being encouraged to develop relations with Russia.

India and the Far East

- Russia simplified electronic visas for India to encourage tourism in the Far East.
- India will also provide an annual grant of \$10,000 to fund the study of Indology at Far Eastern Federal University.
- Far East lacks manpower. Thus, Indian professionals can help in the region's development.
- India, one of the largest importers of timber, can find ample resources in the region.
- The two countries are also looking at the feasibility of Chennai-Vladivostok sea route.
- The Far East has the potential to become an anchor in deepening India-Russia cooperation; more so considering that
- India has expanded the scope of its 'Act East policy' to include Russia and Far East can play important role.

Conclusion

India and Russia should increase their areas of cooperation and trade in order to hedge against disruptive forces and make their ties sustainable.

An intervention that leads to more questions

Category: GS 3 (Security)

1000 words summarized to 150

Why has this issue cropped up?

Recently, Defence Minister appears to have altered a key pillar of India's nuclear doctrine-No First Use .

India's nuclear doctrine

India's nuclear doctrine consists of two pillars:

- "a credible minimum deterrent" and
- "No First Use".

Restraint as a pivotal point

- Restraint has served India well in Kargil war 20 years ago.
- Raising the nuclear threshold gave India sympathy in foreign capitals.
- India's restraint has formed the basis for its claims to belong to the nuclear mainstream —Nuclear Suppliers Group, Missile Technology Control Regime, Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group. .

Is revoking the commitment to NFU policy justified?

- Revoking NFU leave India's doctrine more ambiguous.
- Ambiguity, in turn, can lead to miscalculations, by enemy country.
- Adhering to the NFU does not symbolise weakness as India is committed to a devastating response to nuclear first use.
- However, revoking NFU has led to a more muscular nuclear policy for India.

Privacy no longer supreme

Category: GS 2 (Polity)

800 words summarized to 150

Introduction

In K.S. Puttaswamy case, the Supreme Court held that Indians have a fundamental right to privacy.

Three tests to be passed by the state

The judgment held that the right may be restricted only by state action that passes each of the three tests:

- First, such state action must have a legislative mandate;
- Second, it must be pursuing a legitimate state purpose; and

- Third, it must be proportionate.

Judgment not followed by the govt.

- The govt. continued to commission and execute mass surveillance programmes.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs, in December last year, authorised 10 Central agencies for mass surveillance.
- In July last year, Ministry of Information Broadcasting had floated a tender for 'Social Media Monitoring Hub'.
- A request for similar social media surveillance programme was floated in August last year by the UIDAI.
- The Income-Tax department has its 'Project Insight' which also has similar mass surveillance ends.
- The government has shunned a rights-oriented approach in personal data. This approach is evident in Justice Srikrishna committee.

Conclusion

A rights-oriented data protection legislation which prohibits mass surveillance is still possible.

Giving wings to better air connectivity

Category: GS 3 (Infrastructure)
1000 words summarized to 150

Introduction

Civil aviation is a Central subject that barely got significant attention from the States until recently.

Changing role of states

- Now, the cooperation of States is seen as a major factor in the growth of the civil aviation sector.
- The Regional Connectivity Scheme, UDAN, involves State governments in the growth of the aviation sector.
- The policies of States and Centre are now being interlinked to make flying accessible and affordable.

Suggestions to jump-start the aviation market

- States have very high rates of VAT on ATF. Relief on ATF is a major incentive for airlines to augment their operations.
- There are many regional airports which can be developed by States.

- States and the Central government can support airlines to develop air services in the remote regions.
- States may converge their relevant schemes relating to tourism, health, and insurance for supporting air connectivity.
- States need to facilitate burgeoning Indian middle class to fly at least once a year.

Conclusion

Pooling resources of both the Union and State governments can accelerate the harmonised growth of the Indian civil aviation sector.

Talking trade with the EU

Category: GS 3 (International relations)

500 words summarized to 100

Introduction

Amid U.S.-China trade war, India needs to pursue a FTA with EU.

Time to engage with EU

- Without preferential FTA tariffs or GSP+ status, India will struggle to keep exports competitive for Europe.
- Beyond mere economic cost-benefit analysis, India must also approach an EU FTA from a geo-strategic perspective.
- India should leverage upon the collapse of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and EU concerns about excessive economic reliance on China.
- India's governance framework shares the European norms of democratic transparency in technological domains such as AI.

Conclusion

India must go beyond security and begin with the business of trade and technology with EU.

Rediscovering development banks

Category: GS 3 (Economy)

1000 words summarized to 170

Why has this issue cropped up?

Recently, the govt. announced setting up a development bank.

Purpose of development bank

The purpose is to improve access to long-term finance for infrastructure and housing projects.

What are development banks?

- These are financial institutions that provide long-term credit for capital-intensive investments and yielding low rates of return.
- Development banks are often supported by governments or international institutions.
- Development banks are different from commercial banks which mobilise short- to medium-term deposits.

India's development banks

- IFCI, set up in 1949, was India's first development bank for financing industrial investments.
- In 1955, the World Bank prompted the ICICI Bank.
- In 1964, IDBI was set up as an apex body of all development finance institutions.
- However, development banks got discredited for mounting non-performing assets.
- After 1991, development finance institutions were disbanded and got converted to commercial banks.

Development banks in other countries

- China's development banks have been at the forefront of financing its industrial prowess.
- Germany's development bank, KfW, has been spearheading long-term investment in green technologies.

Conclusion

The govt. should carefully weigh in the past lessons to lay a firm foundation for the new institution.

Spelling out the government's RBI windfall

Category: GS 3 (Economy)

1100 words summarized to 130

RBI has announced a huge transfer of its surplus of ₹1.76 lakh crore to the Central government.

Surplus transfer

- The transfer of RBI surplus to the government occurs every year.
- This augments the non-tax revenue of the Central government.
- But this year is an exception as RBI has announced a huge transfer of ₹1.76 lakh crore.

Arguments against the surplus

- If the economy faces a crisis, the RBI may not have adequate money to protect it.
- It denotes an erosion of the RBI's independence.

Arguments in favour of surplus

- With transfer, the idle cash with RBI can be utilised more productively.
- Transfer occurred after following due process and after accepting the recommendations of the Jalan Committee.
- Transfer could enable the government to go in for bank recapitalisation in a big way.

The transfer could enable the government to stimulate the economy while maintaining budget discipline.

The Last Window

Category: GS 3 (Environment)

700 words summarized to 130

Introduction

Like other countries, India too must act quickly and decisively on the IPCC report.

The IPCC report

The latest IPCC report states that the land surface air temperature has risen by nearly twice the global average temperature, at about 1.3°C.

What should India do?

- planting cover crops, improvements in grazing management, greater use of agroforestry.
- maintaining and extending forest cover.
- compatibility between industrial development and environmental protection
- consulting indigenous people to integrate local knowledge with scientific knowledge.

- need to manage water better both in the short and in the long run.
- drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, use of water efficient agricultural practices,
- traditional rainwater harvesting practices to be scaled up across the nation.
- shift towards a more plant-based based diet.
- Livestock sector management with crop management

Conclusion

It is hoped that the well-being of the masses will take precedence over short-term economic gains for a few.