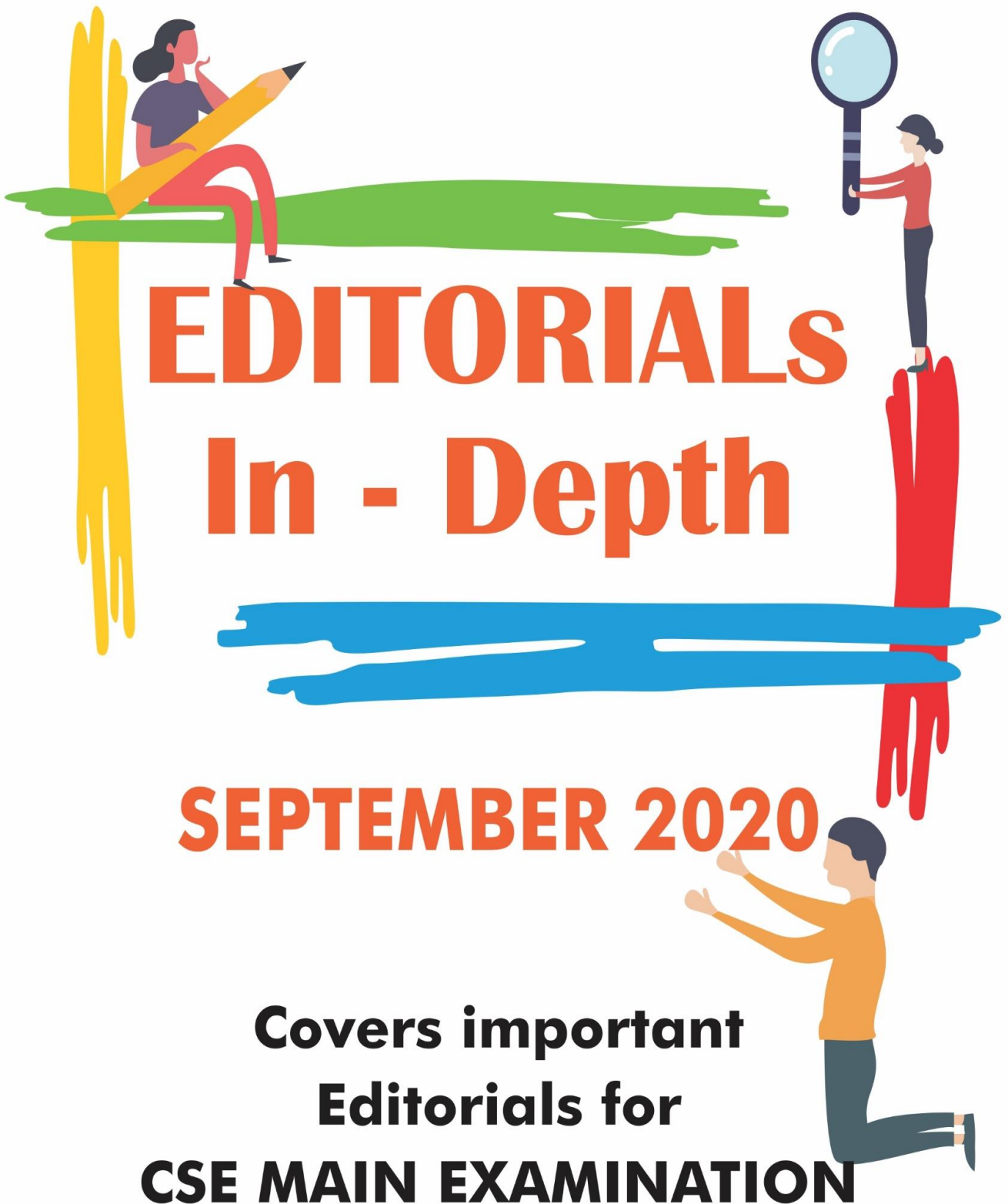




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INEVITABLE COLLAPSE: ON STEEPEST CONTRACTION OF GDP

GENERAL STUDIES- III (INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING)

Recently, the provisional data by **National Statistical Office (NSO)** under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) shows that **India's GDP suffered its steepest contraction on record in the April-June quarter**, as output shrank 23.9% from a year earlier.

The current state of Economy

RBI Annual Report: *the RBI's annual year is different from the regular financial year.* For India's central bank, the annual report of 2019-20 pertains to the period between July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020.

- This otherwise perfunctory fact is relevant **this year because RBI's year included the first quarter (April, May June) of the current financial year.**
- **The RBI stated that** *"an assessment of aggregate demand during the year so far suggests that the shock to consumption is severe, and it will take quite some time to mend and regain the pre-COVID-19 momentum".*
- **GST council meeting:** the Union government expressed its inability to pay the compensation amount — roughly Rs 2.35 lakh crore — that was due to the states under the GST regime.
- Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, while speaking in GST Council meeting, **suggested reverting to the pre-GST regime.** This suggestion could have wide-ranging ramifications for the economy if it is pursued by some of the biggest states in a serious manner.

States, Covid-19 and GST

- As different states try to recover from the impact of Covid-19, they need money, **but the current GST regime has robbed the states of the freedom to raise or lower taxes.**
- Being asked to borrow money from the market instead of getting it from the Centre has made the States question the desirability of the current GST regime.

Export Preparedness Index

- **The index launched by NITI Aayog** ranked Indian states and Union Territories in the context of export preparedness in terms of policy environment, infrastructure etc.
- The **top performers were mostly coastal states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Odisha** but there was one landlocked state that managed to sneak into the top 5 list and it was Rajasthan.
- At the other end of the spectrum were mostly landlocked and Himalayan states such as Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar and Assam.
- But West Bengal stood out for being ranked 22 out of the 36 states and UTs despite being a big coastal state.

McKinsey employment report

- The **McKinsey Global Institute's report** on India's employment needs stated that India will have to create at least 90 million non-farm jobs over the next decade — 145 million at the upper end — and for which it would have to grow at 8 to 8.5 per cent every year.
- This provides an understanding of how job creation may be affected because of GDP contraction or slow growth in the coming years.

Review of ease-of-doing-business rankings

- On August 27, the **World Bank issued a statement** saying that it has ordered a “**systematic review**” and “**internal audit**” of its data and methodology used for compiling the Ease of Doing Business rankings that were published in 2017 and 2019.
- The move is in response to several allegations that data was tweaked for political reasons and to favour some countries.
- It is important to note that **India's ranking improved from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019.**

What can one expect from the GDP data?

- The first quarter saw the strictest lockdowns across the country and chances are it will see the sharpest fall in economic activity in a long while.
- **The composition of growth** – in other words, which sector got hit the most — will set the tone for the rest of the year.
- The amount and nature of the damage will point to the type and magnitude of fiscal and monetary policy efforts required to revive the Indian economy.

How difficult is it to make these estimates and what is their significance?

- GDP projections over the past year or so have increasingly shortened shelf life. All of this points to uncertainty about the shape of economic recovery. In this context, recent GDP data would provide the first benchmark around which future analysis can happen.
- In this financial year, making these estimates and projections is even more difficult because Covid's spread in India has been much worse than the government's expectation.
 - It is now the third-most afflicted country on the planet. What is most worrisome is that the rate of spread of Covid in India's rural areas is almost twice the rate of spread in urban areas.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 3rd SEPTEMBER, 2020

WHAT ARE QUESTION HOUR AND ZERO HOUR, AND WHY THEY MATTER?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE EXECUTIVES)

Recently, the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats notified that there will be **no Question Hour during the Monsoon Session of Parliament**, which has been truncated to September 14-October 1 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, and that **Zero Hour will be restricted in both Houses.**

What is Question Hour?

Generally, the first hour of a sitting of Lok Sabha is devoted to the Questions and this hour is called the Question Hour.

- Question Hour is the liveliest hour in Parliament. **It is during this one hour that Members of Parliament ask questions of ministers and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.**
- The questions that MPs ask are designed to elicit information and trigger suitable action by ministries.

What is its significance?

It has a special significance in the proceedings of the Parliament. Asking of questions is an inherent and unfettered parliamentary right of members.

- It is during the Question Hour that the **members can ask questions on every aspect of administration and Governmental activity.**
- Government policies in national as well as international spheres come into sharp focus as the members try to elicit pertinent information during the Question Hour.
- Asking questions of the government has a long history in our legislative bodies. Prior to Independence, the first question asked of government was in 1893.

What is Zero Hour?

While Question Hour is strictly regulated, **Zero Hour is an Indian parliamentary innovation.**

- The phrase does not find mention in the rules of procedure.
- **The concept of Zero Hour started organically in the first decade of Indian Parliament,** when MPs felt the need for raising important constituency and national issues.
- **Timing:** During the initial days, Parliament used to break for lunch at 1 pm. Therefore, **the opportunity for MPs to raise national issues without an advance notice became available at 12 pm and could last for an hour until the House adjourned for lunch.**
- This led to the hour being popularly referred to as Zero Hour and the issues being raised during this time as Zero Hour submissions. Over the years, presiding officers of both Houses have given directions to streamline the working of Zero Hour to make it even more effective.
- **Its importance** can be gauged from the support it receives from citizens, media, MPs and presiding officers despite not being part of the rulebook.

How is Question Hour regulated?

- Parliament has **comprehensive rules for dealing with every aspect of Question Hour.**
- The **presiding officers of the both houses are the final authority** with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.

What kind of questions are asked?

Parliamentary rules provide guidelines on the kind of questions that can be asked by MPs.

- Questions have to be **limited to 150 words.** They have to be precise **and not too general.**
- The question **should also be related to an area of responsibility of the Government of India.**
- Questions **should not seek information about matters that are secret or are under adjudication before courts.**
- It is the presiding officers of the two Houses who finally decide whether a question raised by an MP will be admitted for answering by the government.

How frequently is Question Hour held?

- Question Hour in both Houses is held on all days of the session. But there are **two days when an exception is made**.
- There is **no Question Hour on the day the President addresses MPs from both Houses in the Central Hall**. The President's speech takes place at the beginning of a new Lok Sabha and on the first day of a new Parliament year.
- **Question Hour is not scheduled either on the day the Finance Minister presents the Budget**. Since the beginning of the current Lok Sabha, approximately 15,000 questions have been asked in the Lower House.

Type of questions asked in Question Hour

To streamline the answering of questions raised by MPs, **the ministries are put into five groups**. Each group answers questions on the day allocated to it.

This grouping of ministries is different for the two Houses so that ministers can be present in one house to answer questions.

The questions are of three types can be asked, namely,

- **Starred questions:** These are distinguished by an **asterisk**. It requires an oral answer and hence supplementary questions can follow. The list of these questions is printed in green colour.
- **Unstarred questions:** It requires a written answer and hence, supplementary questions cannot follow. The list of these questions is printed in white colour.
- **Short notice questions:** The matters of public importance and of urgent character are considered under this type of questions. **It is asked by giving a notice of less than ten days**. It is **answered orally**. The list of these questions is printed in light pink colour.

How do ministers prepare their answers?

- **Ministries receive the questions 15 days in advance** so that they can prepare their ministers for Question Hour.
- They also have to prepare for sharp follow-up questions they can expect to be asked in the House.
- Governments' officers are close at hand in a gallery so that they can pass notes or relevant documents to support the minister in answering a question.
- **When MPs are trying to gather data and information about government functioning**, they prefer the responses to such queries in writing. These questions are referred to as unstarred questions. The responses to these questions are placed on the table of Parliament.

Limit to the number of questions that can be asked

Rules on the number of questions that can be asked in a day have changed over the years.

- In Lok Sabha, **until the late 1960s, there was no limit on the number of unstarred questions** that could be asked in a day.
- Now, **Parliament rules limit the number of starred and unstarred questions an MP can ask in a day**.
- The **total number of questions asked by MPs** in the starred and unstarred categories are then put in a random ballot.

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- From the **ballot in Lok Sabha, 20 starred questions are picked for answering during Question Hour and 230 are picked for written answers.**
- Last year, a record was set when on a single day, after a gap of 47 years, all 20 starred questions were answered in Lok Sabha.

Earlier instances of suspending Question Hour

- Parliamentary records show that **during the Chinese aggression in 1962**, the Winter Session was advanced. The sitting of the House started at 12 pm and there was no Question Hour held.
- Before the session, changes were made limiting the number of questions. Thereafter, following an agreement between the ruling and the Opposition parties, it was decided to suspend Question Hour.

Way forward

The Question Hour is an interesting part of the Parliamentary proceedings. Although a question mainly seeks information and tries to elicit facts on a particular subject, there are many a time lively and quicksilver repartees between the Members asking the questions and the Ministers answering them. These repartees are sometimes coupled with flashes of wit and humour. That is why the public galleries and the press galleries are packed to the capacity during the Question Hour.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 4th SEPTEMBER, 2020

PARTIAL RELIEF: ON AGR DUES

GENERAL STUDIES- II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS)

Recently, The Supreme Court in a decision allowed telecom service providers 10 years' time to settle their adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues to the government comes as a partial relief to the debt-laden industry.

The recent judgment of Supreme Court

- **An October 2019 judgment** of the court in the AGR issue originally wanted the telecom companies to make the repayments in three months.
- The court had concluded that the private telecom sector had long reaped the fruits of the Centre's liberalized mode of payment by revenue sharing regime.
- Later, the **government had proposed in court a 20-year "formula" for telecom companies** to make staggered payments of the dues. But, the court observed that the period of 20 years fixed for payment is excessive. Even after part payment, the dues still run to ₹1.43 lakh crore.

Highlights of Judgment

1. The **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** should decide whether or not spectrum can be sold under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
2. Due to the current Covid-19 situation, **telecom companies should pay 10 per cent of the total dues by March 31, 2021.**

3. Telecom companies would also **have to make payments on or before February 7 every year.**
4. The **non-payment of dues in any year would lead to** accrual of interest and invite contempt of court proceedings against such companies.

What is Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)?

Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the usage and licensing fee that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). It is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees, pegged between 3-5% and 8% respectively.

How is it calculated?

The charges are calculated based on all revenues earned by a telco – including non-telecom related sources such as deposit interests and asset sales.

The issue begin with

- The telecom sector was **liberalised under the National Telecom Policy, 1994** after which licenses were issued to companies in return for a fixed license fee. **To provide relief from the steep fixed license fee**, the government in 1999 gave an option to the licensees to migrate to the revenue sharing fee model.
- Under this, **mobile telephone operators were required to share a percentage of their AGR with the government as annual license fee (LF) and spectrum usage charges (SUC).**
- License agreements between the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the telecom companies define the gross revenues of the latter.
- **AGR is then computed after allowing for certain deductions** spelt out in these license agreements. The LF and SUC were set at 8 per cent and between 3-5 per cent of AGR respectively, based on the agreement.

The origin of dispute

- The dispute between DoT and the mobile operators was **mainly on the definition of AGR.**
- The **DoT argued that AGR includes all revenues (before discounts) from both telecom and non-telecom services.** The companies claimed that AGR should comprise just the revenue accrued from core services and not dividend, interest income or profit on sale of any investment or fixed assets.
- In 2005, **Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) challenged the government's definition** for AGR calculation.
- In 2015, the TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal) stayed the case in favour of telecom companies and held that AGR includes all receipts except capital receipts and revenue from non-core sources such as rent, profit on the sale of fixed assets, dividend, interest and miscellaneous income.
- However, setting aside TDSAT's order, Supreme Court on October 24, 2019 upheld the definition of AGR as stipulated by the DoT.

Why is it important?

- The definition of AGR has been such a contentious issue because **it has huge financial implications for both telcos and the government.**
- The **revenue shared by telcos with the government goes into the consolidated fund of India.**

- It was estimated, after the SC's judgment, that the telecom operators owe the government about ₹92,000 crore in back charges, interest and penalties on license fee alone.
- While the government has been deprived of the extra revenue, the financial implications for telecom companies — who now have to cough up overdue amounts piled up for years — are serious too.

EDITORIAL IN-DEPTH – 5th SEPTEMBER, 2020

A NEW DIMENSION: ON INDIA-U.S.-AUSTRALIA-JAPAN QUADRILATERAL (QUAD)

GENERAL STUDIES- II (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS)

India believes the Quad would be a “good mechanism” to “ensure Freedom of Navigation Operations” (FONOPs) in the Indian Ocean and surrounding oceans including the Indo-Pacific: Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat.

Concerns from the CDS' statement

The recent statement of Chief of Defence Staff suggest that India is now prepared to join Quad military patrols, which marks a departure from its earlier reticence and public statements by the leadership.

- The **Indian Navy has not taken part in any joint patrols outside of the Indian Ocean**, and even within it, held its first one, with France, only recently.
- In terms of the engagement with the Quad, **India has not yet formally announced a decision to include Australia in the annual Malabar exercises with the U.S. and Japan**, although it is expected to do so.
- However, the move from conducting exercises together to joint operations would take time, something that makes the CDS's assertion significant.

What is Quad grouping?

The quadrilateral security dialogue includes **Japan, India, United States and Australia**.

- All four nations find a common ground of being the democratic nations and common interests of unhindered maritime trade and security.
- **The idea was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it.

What are the Significance of this grouping?

- Quad is an **opportunity for like-minded countries to share notes and collaborate on projects of mutual interest**.
- Members **share a vision of an open and free Indo-Pacific**. Each is involved in development and economic projects as well as in promoting maritime domain awareness and maritime security.
- It is one of the many avenues for interaction among India, Australia, Japan and the US and should not be seen in an exclusive context.

China's stance towards Quad

Beijing has long opposed a coalition of democracies in the Indo-Pacific region.

- There is a general understanding that the Quad would not take on a military dimension against any country. **The strategic community in China, nevertheless, had branded it an emerging "Asian NATO".**
- The **Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's famous "Confluence of Two Seas" address** to the Indian Parliament gave a fresh impetus to the Quad concept.
- Also, at a time of strained bilateral ties with China, India's intention to involve Australia in the Malabar drill could only be construed as a move directed against Beijing.

What are the concerns of this Grouping for India?

Following the stand-off in Ladakh, many Indian analysts believe the time is right for India to shed its traditional defensiveness in the maritime domain.

However, by **'putting more pressure on China'** and moving to expand its **'sphere of influence into the entire Indian Ocean and the South Pacific'**, India may be risking harsh consequences.

- At a time when India and China are negotiating a truce on the border in Eastern Ladakh, New Delhi's invitation to Australia to participate in the Malabar exercise sends contrary signals to Beijing.
- If China responded churlishly through aggressive posturing in the Eastern Indian Ocean, it could needlessly open up a new front in the India-China conflict.
- **Besides, cooperation with the U.S. and Japan without attendant benefits of strategic technology transfers** will not improve the Indian Navy's deterrence potential in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **With the strategic contest between the U.S. and China in East Asia and Southeast Asia hotting up**, there is every possibility that the military-Quad will be used to draw India into the security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific.

The ongoing tension with China and the Quad

- Prime Minister Modi said in 2018 that India sees the **Indo-Pacific as a "geographical concept", not a "strategy or a club of limited members"**, and it would be important to know whether that formulation has changed.
- It is clear that the LAC tensions and clashes, as well as the PLA's refusal to implement border agreements, have convinced New Delhi that new strategies will be required to deal with Beijing.
- While India considers its options, it is necessary to remember some of the reasons for its reticence in terms of militarising the Quad in any way.
- **India is the only Quad member not already tied in a treaty alliance with the others**, and according to Minister of external affairs, that **India would never be part of any "alliance system"** would run counter to what the CDS suggests.

Conclusion

Finally, **India is the only country in the Quad that shares a land boundary with China**, and it is unclear how the militarisation of the Quad in Indo-Pacific waters would alleviate the territorial threat it faces.

If, however, New Delhi's view of its Quad engagement has shifted, clarity and an expansion of Gen. Rawat's statement are essential.

COURT'S DRIFT AND CHINKS IN THE JUDICIARY'S ARMOUR

GENERAL STUDIES- II (ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE EXECUTIVE AND THE JUDICIARY)

Recently two significant developments have happened in connection with the Indian judiciary: the decision of the Supreme Court of India in the **matter of Prashant Bhushan's contempt case**, and the **retirement of Justice Arun Mishra**. These events, in their own way, magnify the chinks in the armour of the Supreme Court.

The Bhushan case: Summary

The Supreme Court found lawyer Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt of court for two tweets which it said had shaken the “very foundation of constitutional democracy”.

- Bhushan's first tweet pertained to a picture of Chief Justice SA Bobde in which he is seen sitting on a high-end motorcycle.
- In the second tweet, Bhushan gave an opinion on the role of last four chief justices of India in the context of the state of affairs in the country.

Implications of Supreme Court's decision

In the first instance, the Supreme Court, **in a display of self-proclaimed “magnanimity”**, let off Mr. Bhushan **with a fine of one rupee in the contempt case** against him over two tweets.

- In the alternative, the top court ordered for a **three-month imprisonment term and three years' debarment from practice**.
- Over the course of the hearing, the **Court repeatedly tried to coerce the contemnor, i.e., Mr. Bhushan, to proffer an apology, and kept granting him additional time** for this purpose.
- It was arguably strange behaviour on the part of the Court, and it also appeared embarrassing, for it came across as petulant bargaining more than anything else.

The jurisprudential contribution of this decision to the law of contempt will be studied for years to come, surely, but maybe not for the reasons that the Court intended.

Role of a judge in the limelight

This was among Justice Mishra's last few decisions as a member of the Supreme Court, before he retired on September 2.

- In recent times, many leading scholars, and legal luminaries have speculated on the marked drift of the Supreme Court away from rights-based court to an executive court.
- Of course, to keep such a court going, a judge who is ever ready to step up to handle politically sensitive matters, and who can be relied upon to issue decisions that are in favour of the executive, is always useful.
- However, even as the limelight is on a judge in circumstances like this, the role of the office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) in facilitating the creation of an executive court cannot be ignored.

Executive's chipping away

Theoretically, it is very easy for an all-powerful executive that is looking to seize control over the other arms of the state, and especially an independent judiciary.

- The competence of judges becomes irrelevant in this scheme of things. The combination of opaque systems like the “master of the roster”, and a certain kind of CJI are sufficient to destroy all that is considered precious by an independent judiciary.
- The truly independent and competent judges in the Court have been relegated to adjudicating private disputes, and are considered inconsequential.
- Many commentators have already pointed out how the last three CJIs all used the powers anointed upon themselves via the “master of the roster” to entrust sensitive and important matters to Benches involving Justice Arun Mishra.

The European example of ‘master of the roster’ system

There is enough evidence that the “master of the roster” system does not work anymore. What we need today is legal certainty, and a rules-based mechanism for allocation of cases (e.g., **as followed by the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights, among many other jurisdictions where cases are decided not by full courts but by benches**). This rule can be that cases are allocated randomly. But any kind of rule can be implemented only if judges themselves take a stand and decide.

There should be agreement that no discretion can be allowed, for that is the root cause of so many of our troubles.

A case allocation system that is neutral and rules-based will prevent bench packing, and demonstrate neutrality, impartiality, and transparency.

All this, in turn,

- *Ensures that courts are protected from outside interference;*
- *Improves public confidence in the impartiality and independence of the judiciary;*
- *Assures litigants of equality and fairness; and*
- *Protects basic rights and freedoms by not compromising on them.*

Malaise within

- There is a tendency to view the **threat to judicial independence in India as emerging from the executive branch, and occasionally the legislature.**
- CJI Y.V. Chandrachud, in 1985, he observed, **“There is greater threat to the independence of the judiciary from within than without”**

Conclusion

Surely, this is as good a time as any for the judges of the Supreme Court to unite and seriously consider whether self-preservation trumps institutional independence, or whether they truly want to protect the judiciary from outside influence, and hold their own against an overbearing executive.

THE SEARCH FOR AN END TO THE COMPLEX NAGA CONFLICT

GENERAL STUDIES- III (SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN BORDER AREAS)

Despite having huge strategic significance, India's north-eastern frontier has largely remained marginal in the country's popular imagination as well as mainstream politics. The region has witnessed multiple crises including bloody insurgencies, but still lacks the emotional resonance of the Kashmir conflict due to geographical, cultural, and ethnic factors.

How old is the Naga political issue?

Rooted in the politics of sub-nationalism, complexities of regional geopolitics and the evolving dynamics of counterinsurgency tactics, the Naga insurgency has defied a lasting solution; it is an extraordinarily complicated conflict whose management has involved a mix of violent response and bargaining.

Pre-Independence

- The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India. The first sign of Naga resistance was seen in the formation of **the Naga Club in 1918**, which told the Simon Commission in 1929 "to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times".
- In 1946 came **the Naga National Council (NNC)**, which declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947.
- The NNC resolved to establish a "**sovereign Naga state**" and conducted a "referendum" in 1951, in which "99 per cent" supported an "independent" Nagaland.

Post- Independence

- On March 22, 1952, underground **Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA) were formed.**
- The Government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted **the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.**

The 'Ceasefires'

The Naga insurgency has come a long way, and so has the politics to contain it.

- In the early phase, the Naga insurgents were provided with what has come to be known as '**safe haven**' in **Myanmar**. India's adversaries (China and Pakistan) also provided them with vital external support at one point of time.
- A major accommodative tactic in the form of **statehood to Nagaland in 1963** was not successful.
- Thereafter, the constant pressure from security forces coerced the **Naga National Council (NNC) to sign the Shillong Accord of 1975**, whose offspring was the **National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN).**

The factions

When the NSCN split into several factions, **the Centre responded with entering into peace negotiations with almost each of them.**

- It is these spheres that have come under increasing scrutiny and attack from the Centre through the Nagaland Governor.
- The **Modi government and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah)**, or the NSCN-IM, the most powerful of the Naga insurgent groups which has been in peace talks with the Centre since the 1997 ceasefire.
- They had **signed a framework agreement in August 2015** which was claimed a historic achievement at that time. But a final accord has remained elusive since.

Concern

- When the Centre realised that **privileging one insurgent group could eventually distort the contours of the final peace accord**, it subsequently enlarged the peace process by roping in seven other Naga insurgent groups under the umbrella of Naga National Political Groups (NNPG).
- But another important group, the NSCN- Khaplang, whose cadres are reported to be inside Myanmar, is still outside the formal process.

Culture of extortion

Given this complex backdrop, Nagaland Governor Mr. Ravi's recent letter to Nagaland's Chief Minister Neiphu Rio seems to have opened a Pandora's box.

- Nagaland Governor has told the chief minister that he **"could no longer abstain from constitutional obligations in the state under Article 371A (1) (b) of the Constitution"**.
- Extortions in the name of taxes have been a thorny facet of the Naga issue.
- One of the major aims of the NSCN-IM has been **to acquire formal recognition to this informal practice through negotiations.**

Unease over interpretations

There has already been much debate and controversy about **the interpretation of 'sovereignty'**, as reflected in the latest "Naga Independence Day" speech by NSCN-IM chief Thuingaleng Muivah.

- **Demand for a separate flag and a 'constitution' has been a key hindrance in building trust** among the parties.
- Some Indian States contiguous to Nagaland have been affected through the mobilisation of the Naga population in these States. That is why they are apprehensive of the **demand for 'Greater Nagalim', which would imply a ceding of their Naga-inhabited territories.**
- Another **significant issue is how the weapons in the NSCN-IM camps are going to be managed.**
- **As a 'ceasefire' group, its cadres are supposed to retain their weapons inside the designated camps for self-defence only**, but more often than not, many influential cadres are seen moving with weapons in civilian localities, leading to many problems.

The way forward

The NSCN-IM has demanded the removal of Mr. Ravi as the Centre's interlocutor in the peace process, asking for affirmation of the 2015 framework agreement as being "alive in its original form".

It has further widened the trust deficit is the allegation by the NSCN-IM that the interlocutor has subtly manipulated the framework agreement. It has become even more urgent in view of China's unusually aggressive behaviour in Ladakh.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 9th SEPTEMBER, 2020

WHAT IS IN AND INDIA'S ALIGNMENT?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS)

Recently, India's External Affairs Minister, said that non-alignment was a concept of relevance in a specific era and a particular context, though the independence of action enshrined in it remains a factor of continuity in India's foreign policy.

This is about as explicit an assertion as one is likely to get from our political leadership of an **obvious post-Cold War fact: that non-alignment, as a foreign policy concept, is dead.**

The Non Aligned Movement (NAM)

History in brief

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was created and founded during the collapse of the colonial system and the independence struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and other regions of the world.

- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was established in 1961 with 29 members.
- **India is one of the founding members** of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was established in 1961 with 29 members.
- **It has 120 members as on April 2018** comprising 53 countries from Africa, 39 from Asia, 26 from Latin America and the Caribbean and 2 from Europe (Belarus, Azerbaijan).
- There are 17 countries and 10 international organizations that are Observers at NAM.
- **The Bandung Asian-African Conference** is the most immediate antecedent to the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Conference was held in Bandung on April 18-24, 1955
- "Ten Principles of Bandung" proclaimed at the conference would govern relations among large and small nations.

Bandung principles

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was officially founded in 1961, at the Belgrade Summit. It was drawing on the Bandung Principles agreed at the Afro-Asian Conference held in **Bandung, Indonesia in 1955.**

Jawahar Lal Nehru was one of the founding members, the principles of NAM was largely guided by Panchsheel principles.

The ten principles of Bandung are following-

1. **Respect of fundamental human rights** and of the objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
2. Respect of the **sovereignty and territorial integrity** of all nations.

3. Recognition of the **equality** among all races and of the equality among all nations, both large and small.
4. **Non-intervention or non-interference** into the internal affairs of another -country.
5. Respect of the **right of every nation to defend itself**, either individually or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. **Non-use of collective defense pacts** to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers. B. **Non-use of pressures by any country** against other countries.
7. **Refraining from carrying out or threatening to carry out aggression**, or from using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. **Peaceful solution** of all international conflicts in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of **mutual interests and of cooperation**.
10. Respect of **justice and of international obligations**.

United by a campaign

Non-alignment was a policy fashioned during the Cold War, **to retain an autonomy of policy (not equidistance) between two politico-military blocs.**

- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) provided a platform for newly independent developing nations to join together to protect this autonomy.
- Freed from the shackles of the Cold War, the NAM countries were able to diversify their network of relationships across the erstwhile east-west divide. **Non-alignment lost its relevance, and NAM its original raison d'être.**

India's search of signature tune for foreign policy

For a few years now, non-alignment has not been projected by our policymakers as a tenet of India's foreign policy. However, **it is not yet found a universally accepted successor as a signature tune for our foreign policy.**

- **Successive formulations have been coined and rejected.** Strategic autonomy was one, which soon acquired a connotation similar to non-alignment, with an anti-U.S. tint.
- **Multi-alignment has not found universal favour**, since it may convey the impression of opportunism, whereas we seek strategic convergences. Seeking issue-based partnerships or coalitions is a description that has not stuck.

China factor

In the wake of the current stand-off with China, **there have been calls for India's foreign policy to shed its inhibitions and make a decisive shift towards the United States**, as the only viable option to counter China.

The government has been more nuanced in its approach. The External Affairs Minister clarified that a rejection of non-alignment does not mean a rush to alignment: **India will not join an alliance system.**

Concept of non-alignment

The fact is that 'alliance' is as much a **Cold War concept** as non-alignment.

- During the Cold War, the glue that held countries of an alliance together was **composed of ideological convergence and an existential military threat.**

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- With the **disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Warsaw Pact**, this glue dissolved and the international options of alliance partners widened, just like those of NAM countries.

Alliances in the Asia-Pacific

The strategic interests of alliance partners are no longer congruent. This is evident in the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

- Alliances in the **Asia-Pacific face a bigger definitional dilemma**. They were **originally forged to deter the USSR**.
- The threat to the alliance partners today is from an assertive China, which they are reluctant to define as a strategic adversary, because of their economic engagement with it and the huge military asymmetry.

Geography link

It is often overlooked that geo-strategy derives from both geography and politics. While politics is dynamic, geography is immutable.

- **Two major imperatives flow from India's geography**: economic and security interests in the Indo-Pacific space and the strategic importance of the continental landmass to its north and west.
- The former has inspired the **Act East policy of bilateral and multilateral engagements in Southeast Asia and East Asia and the Pacific**.
- Shared India-U.S. interests in dealing with the challenge from China in the maritime domain have been a strategic underpinning of the bilateral partnership since the early 2000s.
- **Connectivity and cooperation with Afghanistan and Central Asia** need engagement with Iran and Russia, as well as with the Russia-China dynamics in the region.
- Seemingly paradoxically, a **close Russia-China partnership should move India to broad-base relations with Russia** (beyond the traditional defence and energy pillars). A strong stake in relations with India could reinforce Russia's reluctance (which still persists) to be a junior partner of China.

A template and UNSC term

Five years ago, a group of U.S. strategic analysts had suggested that the **U.S. should see ties with India as a joint venture** in which they could pursue shared objectives to mutual benefit and accept that differences of perspectives will have to be addressed.

India will acquire a larger global profile next year, when it commences a two-year term on the UN Security Council. The strategic choices that it makes in its bilateral partnerships will be closely watched.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 10th SEPTEMBER, 2020

MARATHA QUOTA — THE AGITATION, THE POLITICS

GENERAL STUDIES- II (INDIAN CONSTITUTION- SIGNIFICANT PROVISIONS AND BASIC STRUCTURE)

Recently, The Supreme Court referred to a Constitution Bench the question of whether states can exceed the 50% limit on quotas that was set by a nine-judge Bench in the landmark *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India* (1992) case.

The question will now be taken up by a **Bench comprising at least 11 judges**.

Case in Supreme Court

A three Judge Bench of Supreme Court heard a batch of petitions challenging reservations for Marathas in education and jobs in Maharashtra.

- The petitions appealed a 2019 Bombay High Court decision that upheld the **constitutional validity of the Maratha quota under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018**.
- The Bench also heard a petition challenging admission to postgraduate medical and dental courses under the quota in the state.

Bombay HC ruling

A Division Bench of the High Court ruled last year that the **16% quota granted by the state was not “justifiable”**, and **reduced it to 12% in education and 13% in government jobs**, as recommended by the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (MSBCC).

- The Bench ruled that **“the limit of reservation should not exceed 50%”**;
- However, **“in exceptional circumstances and extraordinary situations**, this limit can be crossed subject to availability of quantifiable and contemporaneous data reflecting backwardness, inadequacy of representation and without affecting the efficiency in administration”.
- The court relied heavily on the findings of the 11-member MSBCC, which submitted in November 2018 that the Maratha community is socially, economically and educationally backward.

The Marathas

The Marathas are a politically dominant community who make up **32% of Maharashtra’s population**.

- They have historically been **identified as a ‘warrior’ caste with large landholdings**. Eleven of the state’s 19 chief ministers so far have been Marathas.
- While division of land and agrarian problems over the years have led to a decline of prosperity among middle- and lower middle-class Marathas, the **community still plays an important role in the rural economy**.
- The discontent in the community could spill over into protests and unrest if the quota issue is not resolved soon.
- In 2016-17, the Maratha Kranti Morcha (MKM) led 58 silent protests demanding reservations.
- The **second phase of the protest saw a spate of suicides**. The backward Marathwada region was the worst affected by the protests.

Political playground

All three parties in the ruling coalition, the Congress, NCP, and Shiv Sena, are in favour of the Maratha quota.

- The **sub-committee for Maratha reservation headed by Ashok Chavan** has maintained they had recruited the best lawyers to plead their case in the SC.
- The organisation holds the government responsible for not presenting their case well before the apex court.
- **The opposition BJP** has seen a political opportunity, and would be gearing up to use the developments to consolidate its political base amongst the Maratha community, and make inroads into Congress and NCP bastions in Western Maharashtra and Marathwada.
- **Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi president Prakash Ambedkar** said the court's order does not impact OBCs, who were never against Maratha reservation.
- However, reservation for Marathas should not be at the cost of the existing quota for OBCs.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 11th SEPTEMBER, 2020

THE GREAT GREYING OF CHINA

GENERAL STUDIES- II (INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD- RELATIONS)

There is evidence that the country's aging population will incrementally impede its economic growth.

China's one child policy (OCP)

China's one child policy (OCP) was **conceived by Senior Leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979** to seek popular support for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) **after Mao's disastrous 'Great Leap Forward' and 'Cultural Revolution'** (which led to the death of about 60-65 million people).

Prof. David Lampton, an American sinologist, has observed that Deng was worried that **"if the party did not produce significant gains in per capita income, it would lose what little legitimacy" it had retained.**

Policy fallout

The results of the one child policy have been disastrous.

Average birth rate in China has fallen to **1.6 births per woman** (National Bureau of Statistics of China) in 2017.

- The unofficial figures put it as low as 1.05 (**the United States: 1.77, India: 2.24**) and much less than the **population replacement rate of 2.1.**
- Fewer children were born and of them, fewer were females (given China's preference for boys like in some other countries).
- Research reveals that the **proportion of China's population aged above 65 years would increase from 10% in 2010 to 32.6% in 2050.**
- **Corresponding figures for India are 5.6% and 14.2% and the U.S. 14.6% and 23.2%.**
- Its **labour force (ages 20-64) will reduce** from about a billion in 2017 to 787 million by 2050.
- Thus, **China will be a country dominated progressively by older people in the coming years.**

Failed Measures to arrest greying

Despite the **raising of the limit to two children in 2016**, the number of newborns has not improved and slipped to the pre-2016 level.

- The **one child policy has changed China's child-bearing attitudes** for the worse as many young couples do not want to have two babies for economic and lifestyle reasons.
- Fuxian has affirmed that **China's population has started contracting from 2018 onwards**.
- If China **can stabilise its fertility rate at 1.2**, its population will fall to 1.07 billion in 2050 and 480 million by 2100.

The implications

The aging population will have a multi-dimensional impact.

- **China will need huge expenditures on health**, social welfare and pensions;
- **Its savings rate will decline**; a fall in the number of young people will lead to a decline in manufacturing, exports, and also mean lower revenues for government.
- With its annual per capita income at \$10,000, increasing population of older people and slowing economic growth rates, **China will get old before reaching the levels of rich countries like the United States, Singapore, Japan and others**.
- **China's armed forces are already struggling** as many one child policy children are often misfit for fighting in tougher conditions.

Will the population decline create a richer society in China?

Japanese economist Prof. Hisakazu Kato, says, using Japan's experience, that it is unlikely as a **smaller population reduces intellectual exchanges among diverse human groups**, reducing chances of the emergence of great innovators.

- Developed countries have reduced the impact of declining population by raising the **total factor productivity (TFP)** growth (ratio of output versus cost of inputs per hourly basis).
- China has already availed its rapid TFP growth by shifting its large population of migrant workers from agriculture to manufacturing and reforms in state-owned enterprises, housing and other sectors.

Absolute control

China has never ranked very high in governance indicators of international organisations such as the World Bank;

- In 2016, it was in 68th percentile for 'government effectiveness' and 77th in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (2017).
- Considering that about 40% of China's population still lives in rural areas, this huge gap will be an inhibiting factor in raising TFP.
- **In the last 70 years, only 15 countries have managed to climb from middle to high income status**, g. Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, others and all of them had skilled their workforces with three quarters or more of their working population having completed high school.

Direction taken by china under current regime

Under Mr. Xi, **China is not moving in the direction of reforms incorporated by developed countries**, but evolving its own agenda mainly focused on administrative and bureaucratic improvements concomitantly enhancing party's control over the economy.

Even many Chinese economists are doubtful if Mr. Xi's plans for augmenting TFP and high economic growth through induction of emerging technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence or rapid urbanisation **will succeed in the absence of much-needed reforms in economy, governance and the education system.**

Conclusion

Unlike the past, **China will face a hostile external environment in the coming years as a reaction to Mr. Xi's unfair and aggressive policies**, which will further constrain cooperation in new technologies.

In this background, a more likely scenario is that China's economic growth will stutter and decline as the impact of aging gets more pronounced in the coming years.

EDITORIALS -IN-DEPTH – 12th SEPTEMBER, 2020

THREE ORDINANCES AND THE FRAMER'S PROTEST

GENERAL STUDIES- II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS)

Recently, the Farmer organisations in Haryana defied prohibitory orders imposed amid the pandemic to hold a rally at the Pipli wholesale grain market near Kurukshetra.

Why the farmers are agitated?

In June 2020, the Central government introduced three ordinances to bring in far-reaching agricultural 'reforms' in the country.

They are:

- *The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.*
- *The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020.*
- *The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020.*

But, activists have expressed disappointment saying that the reforms package will not solve the problems of farmers, instead will exacerbate them.

What were the Amendments?

- It 'deregulates' agricultural commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onions and potatoes under the Essential Commodities Act of 1955.
- **Promulgation of two ordinances** has been made to allow farmers to engage with processors, aggregators, large retailers, exporters.
- **The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020** aims to open up agricultural marketing outside notified mandis for farmers, and also remove barriers to inter-State trade.
- **The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020** is aimed at facilitating contract farming.
- Under this, a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season, transferring the risk of market unpredictability from the farmer to the corporate sponsor.

General concerns of Framers

These are anti-farmer and will only result in reduced crop prices for farmers and undermine seed security even further.

- Food security will be eroded as government intervention is eliminated.
- These ordinances promote corporate control of the Indian food and farming systems.
- They will also encourage hoarding and black marketing, in addition to exploitation of farmers.

Brief on the Ordinance

The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020.

Key provision: It aims to open up agricultural marketing outside notified mandis for farmers, and also remove barriers to inter-State trade.

- The ordinance would ***pave the way for the creation of “One India, One Agriculture Market.”***
- It has provisions which increase usage of technology and enable effective dispute resolution mechanisms.
- It is aimed at facilitating contract farming. **In contract farming a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season.**
- Thus, he transfers the risk of market unpredictability from the farmer to the corporate sponsor.

Concerns: The price range fluctuation allowed in this ordinance is narrow (100% increase in the retail price of horticultural produce and 50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable agricultural foodstuffs).

- This stock limit regulation will not be applicable for value chain participants of any agricultural produce if their stock limit remains within their installed capacity.
- It will also not apply to exporters if they can show demand for export.
- However, farmers groups have expressed concern that corporates will benefit more than small farmers from such direct marketing measures.

The Farmers’ Produce Trade And Commerce (Promotion And Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020

Key provision: It seeks to effectively bypass the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets by providing for the freedom to trade in any area outside of private and APMC designated market yards.

Concerns: This leads to a situation where local farmers do not find adequate demand for their produce at MSP in the local market.

- Since most farmers are small or marginal landowners, they do not have wherewithal to transport their produce to large distances.
- Hence, they are forced to sell them at a lower price than the MSP in the local market itself.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020’.

Key provision: It seeks to effectively bypass the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets by providing for the freedom to trade in any area outside of private and APMC designated market yards.

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

It aims to make farmers empowered to engage with processors, aggregators, wholesalers, large retailers, exporters.

Concerns: This leads to a situation where local farmers do not find adequate demand for their produce at MSP in the local market.

- Since most farmers are small or marginal landowners, they do not have wherewithal to transport their produce to large distances.
- Hence, they are forced to sell them at a lower price than the MSP in the local market itself.

Conclusion

The three ordinances will have far-reaching and varying impacts depending on the social, political, economic and cultural contexts of the respective states.

- But such bold and unilateral moves by the Centre fail to incorporate and give due consideration to the immense diversity in the country, not just between the states in terms of land ownership, cropping patterns, historical functioning of agricultural markets etc. but also within them.
- Therefore, it is feared that the three ordinances rather than helping farmers, might end up being a source of distress for millions of small and marginal farmers in the country as have been observed in the past in cases of demonetization and COVID-19 related lock-downs.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 14th SEPTEMBER, 2020

HYBRID WARFARE: WHAT DATA THEY COLLECT, WHY CAUSE FOR CONCERN

GENERAL STUDIES- III (CHALLENGES TO INTERNAL SECURITY)

Early this month, the Chinese-only website of Zhenhua Data Information Technology Co, the company monitoring foreign targets, was pulled down.

What is the hybrid warfare?

Hybrid warfare is a military strategy which employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyberwarfare with other influencing methods, such as fake news, diplomacy and foreign electoral intervention.

- By combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts, the aggressor intends to avoid attribution or retribution.
- Hybrid warfare can be used to describe the flexible and complex dynamics of the battlespace requiring a highly adaptable and resilient response.

Hybrid warfare from China

As early as 1999, *Unrestricted Warfare*, a publication by China's People's Liberation Army, mapped the contours of hybrid warfare.

- It was a shift in the arena of violence from military to political, economic and technological.
- The new weapons in this war, wrote authors Colonel Qiao Liang and Colonel Wang Xiangsui, were those "closely linked to the lives of the common people." And one

morning “people will awake to discover with surprise that quite a few gentle and kind things have begun to have offensive and lethal characteristics.”

- Indeed, **within countries too, political parties target the opposition via these same tools.**
- Every second country is giving hybrid warfare a shot since the Russian breakthrough in 2014-15 (annexation of Crimea and undeclared conflict in eastern Ukraine).

What does Zhenhua Data do?

- It targets individuals and institutions in politics, government, business, technology, media, and civil society.
- **Zhenhua, is Claiming to work with Chinese intelligence,** military and security agencies.
- It monitors the subject’s digital footprint across social media platforms, maintains an “information library,” which includes content not just from news sources, forums, but also from papers, patents, bidding documents, even positions of recruitment.
- **Significantly, it builds a “relational database”,** which records and describes associations between individuals, institutions, and information.
- Collecting such massive data and weaving in public or sentiment analysis around these targets, Zhenhua offers “threat intelligence services.”

What’s the worry?

It is not data per se but the range and the use to which it may be put to that raises red flags.

- Zhenhua’s 24 x 7 watch **collects personal information on the target from all social media accounts;** keeps track of the target’s friends and relationships; analyses posts, likes and comments by friends and followers; collects even private information about movements such as geographic location through Artificial Intelligence tools.
- Domestic security agencies use such data for law and order applications such as tracking protests.
- But, in the hands of foreign agencies with no supervision or oversight, such data can serve a range of purposes.
- Seemingly innocuous granular information may be put together in a broader framework for deliberate tactical manoeuvring.
- That’s at the heart of what Zhenhua itself flaunts as its role in “hybrid warfare.”

Laws regarding the Personal Data in India?

Under the **Information Technology Rules, 2011, under the IT Act, 2000-**

Personal data is *“any information regarding a natural person, which either directly or indirectly, in combination with other information available or likely to be available... is capable of identifying such person.”*

This, however, **does not include information available freely or accessible in the public domain.**

The Supreme Court of India has recognised **the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution** as a part of the right to “life” and “personal liberty”.

How does this monitoring flout any laws in India?

The Supreme Court has stated that **every person should have the right to control commercial use of his or her identity.**

- The court has also said that, the “**right of individuals to exclusively commercially exploit their identity and personal information, to control the information that is available about them on the internet and to disseminate certain personal information for limited purposes alone**” emanates from this right.
- But, **the existing regulations in India so do not impose any conditions** on the use of personal data for direct marketing etc.
- ***the company is undertaking this without consent... a third party scraping your geo-location from social media sites and sharing it with a rival country's intelligence will be seen illegal, at least in some advanced jurisdictions.***
- But **privacy laws are almost impossible to enforce in a foreign jurisdiction** because they differ from country to country. That is unlikely to change anytime soon.

What's the concern over Zhenhua's monitoring?

- **India incrementally blocked over 100 Chinese apps for engaging in activities** “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order” **as flare-ups intensified along the Line of Actual Control.**
- But such moves are unlikely to impact an operation like Zhenhua's.
- There have been a string of recent reports on China's attempts to cultivate potential assets for sensitive military, intelligence or economic information in the US and Europe through social media.

What is the purpose of this Monitoring?

The only plausible purpose is to build capacity for following up on the actionable data. Zhenhua uses the open information environment liberal democracies take for granted to target individuals and institutions.

The threat of surveillance and monitoring of foreign individuals by an authoritarian China is very real.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 15th SEPTEMBER, 2020

URBAN EMPLOYMENT AS THE FOCAL POINT

GENERAL STUDIES- II (INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING)

The contraction of the economy raises concern on the employment situation as the shrinking sectors are those that create the maximum new jobs.

While the ‘**Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**’ launched in June (aimed to provide livelihood opportunities in rural India) could be an immediate relief, the ₹50,000-crore employment scheme cannot be a substitute for decent urban jobs.

Economy and employment

Recent data on the contraction of the economy raises concern on the employment situation in India.

- The shrinking sectors that have been affected the most — **construction (–50%), trade, hotels and other services (–47%), manufacturing (–39%), and mining (–23%)** — are those that create the maximum new jobs in the economy.
- In a scenario where each of these sectors is contracting so sharply, it would lead to either a growing number of people losing jobs or failing to get one, or even both.

Reverse Migration

Migrants, across states in India were calculated at 56 mn in the 2011 Census. Of above 40mn are those heading for the mega cities, and moving largely from the rural Hindi belt in North India.

The current flow of reverse migration in India, which is from urban to rural, however, falls into none of the above categories describing the usual patterns in the movements from rural to urban centres.

- This sharp contraction has to be seen in the light of India having witnessed a **wave of massive ‘reverse migration’ during the early phase of the lockdown**, with millions of workers returning to their home States due to a loss of livelihoods.
- It is doubtful as to when and whether they would return to their places of work, and it would not be unreasonable to assume that a majority of workers might not go back in the near future.

Impact of Lockdown on urban low-end informal jobs

The abrupt announcement of the lockdown exposed the severe vulnerabilities of urban low-end informal jobs as the share of vulnerable employment is higher in India than that of the world or the South Asia region.

- **Vulnerable employment is characterised by inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine the basic rights of workers.**
- The poor quality of jobs and high informality are key for the high level of “working poors” or those living on incomes of less than ₹198 in a day.
- Thus, despite higher economic growth in recent years, working poverty in India also remains high.

Key challenges

Given the contraction and lack of demand in the economy, it is quite plausible that there would be a significant dip in urban employment generation. Thus, there are two challenges policy interventions in securing the livelihoods of workers in urban areas have to address:

- First, to generate more jobs and
- Second, to reduce vulnerabilities by providing decent wages and some form of job security.

Situation in India

The high and persistent incidence of vulnerable employment are a reflection of the nature of the structural transformation process, whereby capital and labour transfer from low to higher value-added sectors.

- **The service sector-led growth** in recent years has intensified this as there is coexistence of strong job creation in some **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-**

intensive services, along with a significant portion of the jobs being created in 'traditional low value-added services.

- The pandemic and associated policy responses have exposed the vulnerability of these urban jobs.

Steps to take

The present crisis calls for a **multi-pronged strategy to tackle the issue of urban jobs**.

First, given the scale of urbanisation, the focus on urban employment generation programmes should be in coordination with local governments; this is key to 'solving other problems faced by cities.

- As these problems are daunting, actors at the local level need to have more resources at their disposal.
- Resource mobilisation could be enabled by the formation of local alliances, involving elected representatives, trade unions, entrepreneurs and community groups'.

Second, a major local initiative would be to design and implement employment-intensive investment policies.

Private investments need to be facilitated by conducive contractual relations between labour and capital.

- **Enterprise formation needs to be an integral part of the strategy**, with converging interests for workers and entrepreneurs on issues related to technology and productivity enhancement.
- **Small and micro enterprises**, the fulcrum of industrialisation, need extra support to balance the interests between labour and capital as neither have collective bargaining powers.

The third element, would be to prioritise urban infrastructure as it accounts for a large share of total investments in the local economy.

The fourth element could be an immediate launch of an urban employment scheme oriented toward building large-scale medical, health and sanitation infrastructure in cities and towns across India.

Investment in infrastructure

However, much of these investments rarely benefit 'poor urban dwellers as housing, roads, sewerage and water systems are inadequate for their needs.

- A labour-intensive approach to building municipal infrastructure can be a cost-effective alternative to capital intensive-approach as wage rates are low.
- Infrastructure investments would spur employment, generate earnings and contribute to small enterprise formation.
- Construction of low-cost housing is another activity that can be carried out using labour-intensive methods, while yielding substantial collateral benefits for urban dwellers', as an ILO document establishes.

Way forward

Under the current circumstances it is not valid to assume that **the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** or its substitutes can absorb a significant proportion of these workers.

MGNREGA and rural jobs schemes have to be strengthened and their capacity increased, but only a portion of the workforce might be accommodated in it.

There will still be a large number of workers who need to be provided with alternative sources of employment, and generating decent urban jobs looks to be the only way out.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 16th SEPTEMBER, 2020

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS: HOW STATES ARE RANKED?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING)

The **absence of more industrialised states such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra**, in the latest ease of doing business rankings from the top rungs and **the presence of states such as Uttar Pradesh (which was in the past far behind but has now shot up to all-India number 2) in the top ranks** has surprised many.

What is the Ease of doing business ranking of states of India?

Ease of doing business ranking of states of India **is the annual ease of doing business index of states and union territories of India based on the completion percentage scores of action items points of annual Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) under the make in India initiative.**

- This ranking of states has been **done by World Bank since 2015 and facilitated by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)**, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (India).
- It is based on the **progress of states in completing annual reform action plan covering 8 key areas** which has a number of points that vary every year.

The latest ease of doing business rankings for Indian states

The latest ease of doing business rankings for Indian states, **released by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).**

- **The objective of DPIIT's reform exercise** is to provide a business-friendly environment, for which the regulations in a state have to be made simpler.
- Therefore, it devised a methodology to rank the states according to the **ease of doing business (EoDB) in a state.**

Methodology

DPIIT provides a set of recommendations meant to reduce the time and effort spent by businesses on compliance with regulation called the **Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP).**

- **BRAP 2019 is an 80-point list of reforms** recommended to simplify, rationalise and digitise the regulatory framework in a state.
- **The reforms are grouped into 12 broad areas** like land administration, labour regulation, obtaining electricity and water supply permits, environment regulation, etc.
- **States are required to submit proof of implementing each reform on the DPIIT's EoDB portal** and submit a list of users of these reforms. A sample of these users is then surveyed to determine the efficacy of these reforms.
- Each question is assigned a weight. The final score is a weighted average of all the responses applicable to a state.

What reforms does DPIIT recommend?

DPIIT recommends **all states have a single-window system** that provides all necessary information on permits and licences required for starting a business.

- **Permissions required from municipal or village government bodies or police for activities** like filming movies should also be explicitly mentioned.
- **To reduce delays further**, DPIIT recommends that the duration of licences be extended or that they be renewed automatically based on self-certification or third-party verification.

How did the states perform?

- **Andhra Pradesh secured the top spot for the third time** since the ranking was first released in 2015.
- **Uttar Pradesh jumped ten spots to number two and Telangana slipped to three.**
- **Gujarat**, which was first in the first-ever edition of the rankings, **was ranked 11 this year;**
- *Haryana slipped all the way to 17.*

TABLE 1: EASE OF DOING BUSINESS RANKS, TOP 10 IN 2019

State	2015	2016	2017	2019
Andhra Pradesh	2	1	1	1
Uttar Pradesh	10	14	12	2
Telangana	13	1	2	3
Madhya Pradesh	5	5	7	4
Jharkhand	3	7	4	5
Chhattisgarh	4	4	6	6
Himachal	17	17	16	7
Rajasthan	6	8	9	8
West Bengal	11	15	10	9
Gujarat	1	3	5	10

Source: DPIIT

TABLE 2: REFORMS, APPLICABLE/IMPLEMENTED

State	Applicable	Implemented
Andhra	187	187
UP	186	184
Telangana	186	184
MP	187	187
Jharkhand	187	186
Chhattisgarh	187	186
Himachal	185	175
Rajasthan	186	183
W Bengal	187	187
Gujarat	187	187

Source: DPIIT

TABLE 3: SHARE (%) IN NEW INVESTMENTS ANNOUNCED

State	2017-18	2018-19
Andhra	6.56	16.29
Haryana	3.37	15.74
Tamil Nadu	4.01	9.32
Gujarat	6.76	7.74
Maharashtra	18.09	6.32
Karnataka	3.32	6.08
Rajasthan	2.01	3.04
MP	2.87	2.73
Odisha	8.25	2.43
NCT Delhi	1.38	1.76

Source: CMIE

Criticism of these rankings

DPIIT'S methodology **does not consider the actual number of reforms implemented by the states.**

- States like **Haryana and Gujarat have implemented all the reforms recommended by the DPIIT**, but were ranked low on the EoDB list.
- Gujarat has reportedly attributed this to **poor response from the survey respondents.**
- The methodology used by the **DPIIT awards points on a reform to a state only if there was an adequate response from users of that response.**

- Ideally, the number of respondents for every state should be decided based on **population** or number of business clusters to ensure that the sample is representative of the state. It is not clear if DPIIT used representative samples.
- Also, business owners' expectations from the governments can differ. **A business owner from Tamil Nadu may assess their state government's IT portal differently from one in UP.**

How do these reforms affect investments?

An analysis by CARE Ratings shows that **"the top-ranking states in terms of ease of doing business have not necessarily been associated with higher shares of new investments announced during the year"**.

- Except for Andhra Pradesh, **the top-ranking states as per these rankings do not have high shares in the total investment during the year.**
- This is because businesses respond to other conditions like the availability of skilled labour, infrastructure, finance, etc.
- In addition, **these rankings do not consider the cost of doing business**, which is what matters to businesses at the end of the day.

Ease of doing business index

Ease of doing business is an **index published by the World Bank.**

- It is an aggregate figure that includes different parameters which define the ease of doing business in a country.
- The ease of doing business index is **an index created jointly by Simeon Djankov and Gerhard Pohl, two leading economists at the Central and Eastern Europe sector of the World Bank Group.**
- **Higher rankings (a low numerical value)** indicate better, usually simpler, regulations for businesses and stronger protections of property rights.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 17th SEPTEMBER, 2020

NEW ORDER IN WEST ASIA: ON ABRAHAM ACCORDS

GENERAL STUDIES- III (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS AND AGREEMENTS)

The Abraham Accords, recently signed in the White House **by the UAE, Bahrain and Israel, under U.S. President Donald Trump's mediation**, clearly mark a new beginning in the relations between the Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdoms and the Jewish state.

Highlights of the Abraham Accords

Israel and two Arab Gulf states, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, have formally and publicly established diplomatic relations.

- The White House is calling the agreements **"The Abraham Accords"**.
- **The U.A.E. and Bahrain are the third and fourth Arab countries to open diplomatic relations with Israel; Egypt and Jordan were the first two.**

The brief analysis of the Accord

The accords, **the first between Israel and Arab countries since the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty**, also offer a rare diplomatic win to Mr. Trump, whose other foreign policy bets, be it Iran or North Korea, were either disastrous or stagnant.

With less than 50 days to go before his re-election bid, he has called the agreements “**the new dawn of a new Middle East**”.

Under the agreement, **the UAE and Bahrain would normalise ties with Israel**, heralding better economic, political and security engagement. More Arab countries are expected to follow suit, say U.S. and Israeli officials.

- The **agreements have the backing of Saudi Arabia, arguably the most influential Arab power and a close ally of the UAE and Bahrain.**
- The ailing, octogenarian ruler of the Kingdom, Salman bin Abdulaziz, is treading cautiously for now, but Riyadh has opened its airspace for commercial flights between the UAE and Israel.

Historical and geopolitical significance

Though of historical and geopolitical significance, it is too early to say whether the accords will have any meaningful impact on West Asia's myriad conflicts.

- Unlike Egypt and Jordan, which signed peace treaties with Israel in 1979 and 1994, respectively, the Gulf countries are not frontline states in the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- They had established backroom contacts with Israel years ago; what is happening now is their normalisation.

Accord and the Palestinian

The agreements leave the Palestinian question largely unaddressed.

- **With Arab countries signing diplomatic agreements with Israel bilaterally**, the Arab collective support for the Palestinian movement for nationhood, **which has been the basis of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, is crumbling.**
- But it does not mean that the Palestinian question would fade away.
- The vacuum left by the retreat of the Arab powers from the Israel-Palestine conflict is being filled by the non-Arab Muslim powers — Iran, Turkey and their allies.

A change in the Middle-East

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announces full diplomatic ties will be established with the United Arab Emirates, during a news conference on Aug 13, 2020 in Jerusalem.

- Foreign Minister Zayed said the UAE is witnessing a change in the Middle-East, one that gives hope around the world.
- This peace accord will continue to have a positive impact as we believe that its reverberations will be reflected on the entire region, every option other than peace would signify destruction, poverty, and human suffering.
- This new vision which is beginning to take shape as we meet today for the future of the region for love, youthful energy is not a slogan that we raise for political gain.

Road to lasting security and prosperity

The peace between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Israel is a step on the road to genuine and lasting security and prosperity.

- For too long the Middle East has been set back by conflict and mistrust causing uncontrolled destruction and thwarting the potential of generations of our best and brightest young people. Now this is the opportunity to change that.
- The White House, in a statement, said the deal will strengthen peace in the region, giving Muslims increased access to the Al Aqsa Mosque.
- This will counter the extremists who use the false narrative that the Al Aqsa Mosque is under attack and that Muslims cannot pray at this holy site.

Conclusion

The deal between the UAE and Israel represented a significant breakthrough in diplomatic relations between the two nations as the Trump administration works to facilitate cooperation between Arab nations and Israel.

Trump, seeking re-election in the November 3 presidential election against his Democratic Party rival, Joe Biden, is hoping that the two major diplomatic deals would help him in the polls.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 18th SEPTEMBER, 2020

REJECT THIS INEQUITABLE CLIMATE PROPOSAL

GENERAL STUDIES- III (CONSERVATION)

The UN Secretary General's recently advice to India amounts to asking for its virtual de-industrialisation and stagnation and reduce emissions by 45% by 2030.

What is the Climate diplomacy?

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century – the repercussions for our foreign policy agenda are substantial. **Climate change demands a prominent role in foreign policy.**

*In light of the slow pace of progress in international climate negotiations, a stronger role for foreign policy in international climate policy has been called for– **namely through climate diplomacy.***

Piling on the pressure

In an extraordinary move in climate diplomacy, Mr. Guterres, delivering the Darbari Seth Memorial Lecture on August 28, at the **Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), in New Delhi**, called on India to make no new investment in coal after 2020.

- It was in reality a deliberate setting aside of the foundational principles of the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** that distinguish sharply between the responsibilities and commitments of developed countries vis-à-vis those of developing countries.

Implication of UN Secretary General's advice

Delivered on Indian soil, at a premier climate institution in the country, and in the presence of India's External Affairs Minister, the speech was an unmistakable ratcheting up of pressure on India in the climate arena.

- **He has also called China and India too to reduce their emissions by 45% by 2030, on a par with the developed countries while releasing the latest climate report of the World Meteorological Organization.**
- **To add insult to injury**, the advice was delivered after it was evident that India, with the lowest per capita income among the G-20, is undergoing the worst economic contraction among them currently, whose long-term impact is still very unclear.

India's track record

Its renewable energy programme is ambitious while its energy efficiency programme is delivering, especially in the domestic consumption sector.

India is one of the few countries with at least 2° Celsius warming compliant climate action, and one of a much smaller list of those currently on track to fulfilling their Paris Agreement commitments.

- Despite the accelerated economic growth of recent decades **India's annual emissions, at 0.5 tonnes per capita, are well below the global average of 1.3 tonnes.**
- It is **also behind those of China, the United States and the European Union (EU)**, the **three leading emitters in absolute terms**, whose per capita emissions are higher than this average.
- **In terms of cumulative emissions**, India's contribution by 2017 was only 4% for a population of 1.3 billion, whereas the European Union, with a population of only 448 million, was responsible for 20%.

What then lies behind the UN chief's call to India to set aside coal right away?

The UNFCCC itself has reported that between 1990 and 2017, **the developed nations (excluding Russia and east Europe) have reduced their annual emissions by only 1.3%.**

- While **talking about their phasing out of coal**, which is often a decade or more into the future, the **global North has obscured the reality of its continued dependence on oil and natural gas**, both equally fossil fuels, with no timeline for their phase out.
- While it is amply clear that their commitments into the future set the world on a path for almost 3°C warming, **they have diverted attention by fuzzy talk of "carbon neutrality" by 2050**, and the passage of resolutions declaring a climate emergency that amount to little more than moral posturing.

A First World strategy

The large sections of First World environmentalist opinion, **while unable to summon up the domestic political support required for climate action**, have turned to pressure the developing countries to bear the brunt of climate mitigation.

Their strategies include:

- The demonising of coal mining and coal-based power generation,
- Promoting claims that immediate climate mitigation would miraculously lower domestic inequalities and ensure climate adaptation,
- Promoting Third World natural resources as active sites of mitigation and not adaptation, and

- Promoting theories of “de-growth” or the neglect of industrial and agricultural productivity for the pursuit of climate change mitigation.

Ending coal investment

What will be the consequences if India indeed ceases all coal investment from this very year?

Currently, **roughly 2 GW of coal-based generation is being decommissioned per year**, which implies that by 2030, India will have only 184 GW of coal-based generation.

- But **meeting the 2030 electricity consumption target of 1,580 to 1,660 units per person per year**, will require anywhere between 650 GW to 750 GW of renewable energy.
- Unlike the developed nations, **India cannot substitute coal substantially by oil and gas and despite some wind potential**, a huge part of this growth needs to come from solar.
- None of this will really drive industry, particularly manufacturing, since renewables at best can meet residential consumption and some part of the demand from the service sector.
- Currently, manufacturing growth powered by fossil fuel-based energy is itself a necessity, both technological and economic, for the transition to renewables.

Conclusion

Apart from the impossibility of India implementing a 45% reduction in emissions by 2030, the advice by the UN Secretary General, taken all together, amounts to asking for the virtual de-industrialisation of India, and stagnation in a low-development trap for the vast majority of its population.

India must unanimously reject the UN Secretary General’s call and reiterate its long-standing commitment to an equitable response to the challenge of global warming.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 22nd SEPTEMBER, 2020

DILUTION WITHOUT ADEQUATE DELIBERATION: ON LABOUR LAWS

GENERAL STUDIES- II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES)

On September 19, the **government withdrew three Bills related to labour laws and replaced them with new ones**. These Bills make significant changes to regulation of labour and the employer-employee relationship in several ways.

Background

India has a complex regime of labour laws, and several committees have recommended simplifying and rationalising them.

- Last year, the **government introduced four labour codes as Bills to replace 29 existing laws**.
- These Codes dealt with regulation of wages, occupational safety and health, social security, and industrial relations. **The Code on Wages was passed by Parliament last year**.
- Over the last few months, **the Standing Committee on Labour presented its reports on the other three Bills**. It is these three Bills that the government has replaced and introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Major changes

There are several aspects of these Bills that differ significantly from the earlier Bills.

First, the 2020 Bills raise several thresholds:

- **The Factories Act of 1948** defines any manufacturing unit as a factory if it employs 10 workers (and uses electricity) or 20 workers (without using electric power).
- These thresholds are being raised to 20 and 40 workers, respectively.
- **The Industrial Disputes Act of 1947** requires any establishment employing over 100 workers to seek government permission before any retrenchment; the threshold has been raised to 300, with the government empowered to raise it further through notification.
- These changes have been debated for over two decades but were not proposed in the 2019 Bill.
- **The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946** requires employers to formally define conditions of employment under them if they have at least 100 workers.
- The 2020 Bill has increased this threshold to 300 workers.

Second, increasing government's powers:

The Code on Industrial Relations governs working conditions, trade unions, retrenchment and layoffs, dispute resolution, and establishes industrial tribunals.

- The government may, in public interest, **exempt any new industrial establishment from the provisions of this Code.**
- **The Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions specifies leave and maximum work hours, requires health and safety norms** including adequate lighting and ventilation and welfare measures.
- **It subsumes 13 Acts including the Factories Act.**
- **The 2020 Bill allows the State government to exempt any new factory from its provisions in the interest of increased economic activity and employment generation.**
- Given that every new factory would lead to incremental employment, this gives wide discretion to the State government to exempt new factories from basic safety and welfare norms.
- Note that the Factories Act permitted such exemption for a **limited period of three months only during a "public emergency"**.

Third, changes related to contract labour:

- **The 2019 Bill was applicable to establishments which employed at least 20 contract workers** and to contractors supplying at least 20 workers; **these thresholds have been raised to 50 workers.**
- **The 2020 Code prohibits the employment of contract workers in any core activity**, and specifically permits employment in a specified list of non-core activities including canteen, security and sanitation services.

Fourth, Occupational Safety:

- **Fourth, the 2019 Bill on Occupational Safety** allowed the government to prohibit employment of women in undertaking operations that could be dangerous to their health and safety.
- **The 2020 Bill removes this power to prohibit employment** and instead allows the government to require employers to provide adequate safeguards.

A shift in approach

- All the three Bills (both the 2019 and 2020 versions) also show a major shift in approach from the earlier laws.
- Many **essential features of the law are no longer specified in the Codes** but have been delegated to be prescribed by the government through Rules.

Concerns

An important issue for consideration is **whether there should be relaxations for small enterprises to reduce their compliance burden.**

- It may be argue that some matters such as safety standards should apply to everyone while others that provide job security could be based on the size of the firm.
- The **Occupational Safety Bill** (which prescribes safety standards and maximum work hours) **exempts small establishments from its purview** while the Industrial Relations Bill applies to all.

Conclusion

These three new Bills were introduced on Saturday, and the Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha has allocated three hours for them to be discussed and passed this week.

- The provisions of the Bill affect every person working in India and every employer, and address complex issues.
- It is difficult to believe that Members of Parliament, who are attending Parliament every day including weekends, have had the time to read and understand the implications of the various provisions of the Bill.
- Therefore, it is important that there is wider scrutiny and public discussion on these Bills.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 23rd SEPTEMBER, 2020

E-LEARNING IN INDIA, A CASE OF BAD EDUCATION

GENERAL STUDIES- II (ISSUES RELATING TO EDUCATION)

Equality of opportunity to all is one of the basic principles of our Constitution. From an educational point of view, **John Dewey, American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer**, strongly argued that *“An environment in which some are limited will always in reaction create conditions that prevent the full development even of those who fancy they enjoy complete freedom for unhindered growth.”*

The key issues in current Education Pattern

Our education system was never very efficient even in the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has rendered it extremely biased and faulty.

- **The main thrust of providing learning opportunities while schools are shut is online teaching.** There are **several sets of guidelines and plans** issued by the government, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for this purpose.
- The Internet space is teeming with learning schemes, teaching videos, sites and portals for learning opportunities.

There are three pertinent issues in this whole effort of online education and schemes that need serious consideration.

- *One, an exacerbation of inequality;*
- *Two, the pedagogical issues leading to bad quality education; and*
- *Three, an unwarranted thrust on online education, post-COVID-19.*

Exacerbation of inequality

It is worth repeating a truism that **calamities, be they natural or man-made, affect the underprivileged the hardest**; COVID-19 is no exception.

- The plight of millions of migrant labourers, many of who walked thousands of kilometres right in the beginning of the lockdown, proved the point adequately.
- **A similar but less noticed deprivation is being visited to children of the same people**, which may push the next generation in a direction of even greater comparative disadvantage.
- In our society **there is no large movement that may generate any hope of an improved situation in terms of equality and social justice.**
- Therefore, any positive change that might come about will be a cumulative result of the development of capabilities and grit in individuals.

The Covid-19 and the Education

The COVID-19 **shutdown has affected this opportunity for the poor even harder than their counterparts from well-to-do sections of society.**

- The government began **plans for students with no online access** only by the end of August. These plans assume **semi-literate or illiterate parents teaching children, community involvement, mobile pools, and so on.**
- As a result, whatever online or digital education is available is for students with only online access. Thus, **digital India may become even more unequal and divided than it already is.**
- **The NCERT declares in its Learning Enhancement Guidelines, or LEG** that 60-70% students, teachers and parents consider learning satisfactory.
- However, **its survey asks a single question on the feeling of students using the criteria of 'joyful to burdensome'.** The happiness or otherwise of the student while learning is, of course, important, but it says nothing about the quantum and depth of learning.

Listening to lectures on the mobile phone, copying from the board where the teacher is writing, frequent disconnections and/or having blurred video/audio can hardly and organically connect the child's present understanding with the logically organised bodies of human knowledge.

No focus on concepts

The teaching mathematics, science, history, and the English language, one can hardly avoid noticing problems with them.

- In the science and mathematics videos, in particular, there are many misconceptions and ambiguities. The emphasis is more on 'tricks' to remember for success in an examination than laying the stress on conceptual understanding.
- Many worldwide **educators have questioned the quality of teaching and have pointed out inadequate or plainly wrong concepts, particularly in mathematics.**

The thrust, post-COVID-19

It has been presented as a harbinger of a revolution in education for more than three decades now.

- The NCERT's LEG states that "COVID-19 has created a situation which demands transformation in school education... the transaction mechanisms in school education may go through a drastic change.
- NCERT recommends that "alternative modes of education for the whole academic session including Internet-based, radio, podcast, community radio, IVRS, TV DTH Channels, etc." should be developed.
- This transformation of schools in the current understanding of pedagogy, suitability of learning material and quality of learning provided through IT will further devastate the already inadequate system of school education in the country.
- Of course, IT can be used in a balanced manner where it can help; but it should not be seen as a silver bullet to remedy all ills in the education system.

Institutional environment

The importance of an institutional environment cannot be overemphasised when one thinks of online teaching.

- Even when the institutions function sub-optimally, students themselves create an environment that supports their growth morally, socially and intellectually in conversations and interactions with each other.
- The online mode of teaching completely forecloses this opportunity.

Conclusion

Our democracy and public education system have, as usual, left the neediest in the lurch and are providing bad education to those who matter.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 28th SEPTEMBER, 2020

FARM BILLS: WHO GAINS AND WHO LOSES?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES)

In June 2020, the Central government introduced three ordinances to bring in far-reaching agricultural 'reforms' in the country.

They are:

- *The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.*
- *The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020.*
- *The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020.*

But, activists have expressed disappointment saying that the reforms package will not solve the problems of farmers, instead will exacerbate them.

Farmers have taken to the streets, protesting against three Bills on agriculture market reforms that were passed by Parliament last week and will become laws once they are signed by the President.

What are the three Bills?

The Bills which aim to change the way agricultural produce is marketed, sold and stored across the country were initially issued in the form of ordinances in June.

They were then **passed by voice-vote in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha during the delayed monsoon session this month, despite vociferous Opposition protest.**

1. **The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020**, allows farmers to sell their harvest outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis without paying any State taxes or fees.
2. **The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020**, facilitates contract farming and direct marketing.
3. **The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020**, deregulates the production, storage, movement and sale of several major foodstuffs, including cereals, pulses, edible oils and onion, except in the case of extraordinary circumstances.

The government hopes the new laws will provide farmers with more choice, with competition leading to better prices, as well as ushering in a surge of private investment in agricultural marketing, processing and infrastructure.

What is the Minimum support prices (MSP)?

*These are the pre-set rates at which the Central government purchases produce from farmers, regardless of market rates, and are **declared for 23 crops at the beginning of each sowing season.***

Will farmers get minimum support price?

- Most of the slogans at the farmers' protests revolve around the need to protect MSPs, or minimum support prices, which they feel are threatened by the new laws.
- However, the MSP are declared *for* 23 crops at the beginning of each sowing season, **the Centre only purchases paddy, wheat and select pulses in large quantities**, and only 6% of farmers actually sell their crops at MSP rates, according to the 2015 Shanta Kumar Committee's report using National Sample Survey data.
- None of the laws directly impinges upon the MSP regime, **but there is also not categorically mention about assured MSP for crops in the Laws.**

Farmer's demand

However, most government procurement centres in Punjab, Haryana and a few other States are located within the notified APMC mandis.

- Farmers fear that **encouraging tax-free private trade outside the APMC mandis will make these notified markets unviable, which could lead to a reduction in government procurement itself.**
- Farmers are also demanding that **MSPs be made universal, within mandis and outside**, so that all buyers — government or private — will have to use these rates as a floor price below which sales cannot be made.

Why are protests vociferous in some States?

More than half of all government procurement of wheat and paddy in the last five years has taken place in Punjab and Haryana, according to Agriculture Ministry data.

- **More than 85% of wheat and paddy grown in Punjab, and 75% in Haryana**, is bought by the government at MSP rates. **Farmers in these States fear that without MSPs, market prices will fall.**
- **These States are also most invested in the APMC system**, with a strong mandi network, a well-oiled system of arthiyas or commission agents facilitating procurement, and link roads connecting most villages to the notified markets and allowing farmers to easily bring their produce for procurement.
- **The Punjab government charges a 6% mandi tax** (along with a 2.5% fee for handling central procurement) and earns an annual revenue of about ₹3,500 crore from these charges.

The Agricultural legislation and the appropriation of state's rights

One of the major concerns raised by regional political parties is that **agriculture falls in the State list**, arguing that the Centre should not be making legislation on this subject at all.

- They are concerned about **the loss of revenue from mandi taxes and fees**, which currently range from 8.5% in Punjab to less than 1% in some States.
- Some economists and activists say both Punjab and Rajasthan are considering **legal measures to expand the bounds of their APMC mandi yards to ensure that they can continue collecting taxes on all agricultural trade within their State's borders.**
- States such as Chhattisgarh and Odisha have only seen procurement increase over the last five years, after the implementation of decentralised procurement.
- Paddy farming has received a major boost with procurement at MSPs and farmers fear their newly assured incomes are at stake.

Conclusion

The majority of agricultural marketing already happens outside the mandi network, with only 7,000 APMC markets operating across the country.

- **Bihar, Kerala and Manipur do not follow the APMC system at all.** However, most private buyers are currently small traders at local mandis.
- The **removal of stock limits and facilitation of bulk purchase and storage** through the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act **could bring large corporate players into the agriculture space.**
- Although they will bring much-needed investment, they could also skew the playing field, with small farmers unlikely to match them in bargaining power.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 29th SEPTEMBER, 2020