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EDITORIALS
In - Depth

NOVEMBER - 2020

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TIME FOR A 'SPONGE CITIES' MISSION IN INDIA

GENERAL STUDIES - III (DISASTER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT)

Unpredictable nature, unbridled avarice and untrammelled urbanisation are back in currency, this time, in the wake of torrential rains in the third week of October in Hyderabad. Over 50 people died. Hundreds of riverbed hutments were flushed away.

This experience is not unique to the city of Hyderabad but something that cities across India have been experiencing in recent years.

The case of Hyderabad

Almost 10 years ago, scientists from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany, built climate change adaptation tools for Hyderabad. However, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority of that time did not use it.

- The first is unprecedented rainfall. The rainfall received in 2020 has been the highest for the month of October in a century.
- The floods of October 2020 occurred because we did not discharge the water in time. And when we did discharge the water, we did it in a sudden, uncontrolled manner.
- The second is antiquated infrastructure. Hyderabad's century-old drainage system (developed in the 1920s) covered only a small part of the core city.
- The narrative of antiquated infrastructure conceals the fact that the city has grown rapidly, and into areas where there was no drainage infrastructure to begin with.
- And as the city grew beyond its original limits, not much was done to address the absence of adequate drainage systems.

Communities are left out

Government pronouncements, media representations and public protests have all focused repeatedly on factors which by their very description fall outside our capacity to influence.

- The general discourse on this neglect the issues of incremental land use change, particularly of those commons which provide us with necessary ecological support — wetlands.
- This framing also disavows the role of local communities in managing local ecosystems — people with traditional rights for fishing and farming.
- This is a lesson that has been learnt by others around the world. We need to start paying attention to the management of our wetlands by involving local communities.

Making cities permeable

Urban floods of this scale cannot be contained by the municipal authorities alone. Nor can they be dealt with by the State government. They cannot be managed without concerted and focused investments of energy and resources.

Such investments can only be done in a **mission mode organisation with active participation of civil society organisations at the metropolitan scale.**

Sponge Cities

We need a mission that mitigates flood risk and provides a pathway to water security. The most promising idea across the world at this time appears to be the **idea of “sponge cities”**.

- The **idea of a sponge city is to make cities more permeable** so as to hold and use the water which falls upon it.
- **Sponge cities absorb the rain water**, which is then naturally filtered by the soil and allowed to reach urban aquifers.
- This allows for **the extraction of water from the ground** through urban or peri-urban wells. This water can be treated easily and used for city water supply.
- In built form, **this implies contiguous open green spaces, interconnected waterways, and channels and ponds across neighborhoods** that can naturally detain and filter water.
- It implies **support for urban ecosystems, bio-diversity and newer cultural and recreational opportunities**.
- These can all be delivered effectively through an urban mission along the lines of the **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) and Smart Cities Mission**.

MISSION OBJECTIVES

Wetland Policy

The first Objective is **wetland policy**. In most of our lakes, the shallow ends, which often lie beyond the full tank level, have disappeared.

- These shallow ends are best characterised as wetlands; sometimes owned by private individuals, other times existing as ecological commons.
- Regardless of ownership, land use on even this small scale needs to be regulated by development control.

Watersheds, terrain alteration

Watershed management and emergency drainage plan is next.

- This should be **clearly enunciated in policy and law**. Urban watersheds are micro ecological drainage systems, shaped by contours of terrain.
- The Metropolitan Development Authorities, National Disaster Management Authority, State revenue and irrigation departments along with municipal corporations should be involved in such work together.

Prohibition on Terrain alteration

- **Lasting irreversible damage has been done to the city by builders, property owners, and public agencies** by flattening terrain and altering drainage routes.
- **Terrain alteration needs to be strictly regulated** and a ban on any further alteration of terrain needs to be introduced.

Stop the blame, start action

Acknowledging the role of different actors for the city can create a practical space to begin this work.

- Doing so will not just help control recurring floods but also respond to other fault lines, provide for water security, more green spaces, and will make the city resilient and sustainable.
- The constant search for a scapegoat to blame, while a few people try what they can, limits our capacities and only creates cycles of devastation.

Conclusion

We must not allow nature, human conduct, and urbanisation to be mystified and rendered as trans-historic villains.

- We can learn to live with nature, we can regulate human conduct through the state and we can strategically design where we build.
- We need to urgently rebuild our cities such that they have the sponginess to absorb and release water without causing so much misery and so much damage to the most vulnerable of our citizens, as we have seen.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 4th NOVEMBER – 2020

THE IMPORTANCE OF GILGIT-BALTISTAN

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

November 1 is observed every year in Gilgit-Baltistan as “Independence Day”, by Pakistan. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that his government would give the region “provisional provincial status”.

If it happens, **Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) will become the fifth province of Pakistan**, although the region is claimed by India as part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu & Kashmir as it existed in 1947 at its accession to India.

Location of Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan is the **northernmost territory administered by Pakistan**.

It provides the country's only territorial frontier, and thus a land route, with China, **where it meets the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.**

- The **China Pakistan Economic Corridor** has made the region vital for both countries.
- **To G-B's west is Afghanistan, to its south is Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and to the east J&K.**

What is the region's current status?

Though Pakistan, like India, links G-B's fate to that of Kashmir, **its administrative arrangements are different from those in PoK.**

While PoK has its own Constitution that sets out its powers and their limits vis-à-vis Pakistan, **G-B has been ruled mostly by executive fiat.**

- Until 2009, the region was simply called Northern Areas.
- It got its present name only with the **Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order, 2009**, which replaced the **Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC)** with the Legislative Assembly.
- In 2018, **Pakistan government passed an order centralising even the limited powers granted to the Assembly**, a move linked to the need for greater control over land and other resources for the infrastructure projects then being planned under CPEC.
- **The order was challenged, and in 2019, the Pakistan Supreme Court repealed it** and asked the Imran Khan government to replace it with governance reforms. However, This was not done.
- Meanwhile, the **Supreme Court extended its jurisdiction to G-B**, and made arrangements for a caretaker government until the next Legislative Assembly elections.
- **The last polls were held in July 2015**, and the Assembly's five-term ended in July this year. Fresh elections could not be held because of the pandemic.

Events that led to Pakistan's illegal occupation on G-B

On **November 1 1947**, after J&K ruler Hari Singh had signed the **Instrument of Accession with India**, and the Indian Army had landed in the Valley to drive out tribal invaders from Pakistan, **there was a rebellion against Hari Singh in Gilgit.**

- **A small force raised by the British to guard Gilgit**, ostensibly on behalf of the Kashmir ruler.
- But in fact it was to serve its administration of the Gilgit Agency, **on the frontiers of what was then the Soviet-British Great Game territory**, mutinied under the leadership of its commander, Major William Alexander Brown.
- **Gilgit had been leased to the British by Hari Singh in 1935.** The British returned it in August 1947.
- Hari Singh sent his representative, Brigadier Ghansar Singh, as Governor, and Brown to take charge of the Gilgit Scouts.

- But after taking protective custody of the Governor on November 1, **Brown would raise the Pakistani flag at his headquarters.** Later the Gilgit Scouts managed to bring Baltistan under their control.

Why the separate status?

Pakistan's separate arrangement with G-B go back to the circumstances under which it came to administer it.

- **Pakistan did not accept G-B's accession although it took administrative control of the territory.**
- **After India went to the UN** and a series of resolutions were passed in the Security Council on the situation in Kashmir, **Pakistan believed that neither G-B nor PoK should be annexed to Pakistan,** as this could undermine the international case for a plebiscite in Kashmir.
- It also reckons that in the event a plebiscite ever takes place in Kashmir, votes in G-B will be important too.
- This is why it is only being called "provisional" provincial status.

Is granting this status a step towards Pakistan accepting the LoC status quo?

- While **India has objected to the plan to make G-B a province of Pakistan** and in the recent past asserted that it will take control of G-B, **there is a realisation that it is impossible to change the map now.**
- In this sense, **it can argued that the merger of G-B with Pakistan is a move that could help both countries** put the past behind and move forward on the Kashmir issue, sometime in the future.

What do the people in G-B want?

The people of G-B have been demanding for years that it be made a part of Pakistan, they do not have the same constitutional rights Pakistanis have.

- There is **virtually no connect with India.** Some have in the past demanded a merger with PoK, but the **people of G-B have no real connect with Kashmir either.**
- **They belong to several non-Kashmiri ethnicities, and speak various languages, none of these Kashmiri.**

Overview of G-B's sentiments

A majority of the **estimated 1.5 million G-B residents are Shias.**

- **There is anger against Pakistan for unleashing extremist sectarian militant groups that target Shias,** and for dictating over the use of their natural resources.
- But the **predominant sentiment** is that all this will improve once they are part of the Pakistani federation.
- There is **also a small movement for independence,** but it has very little traction.

NEED OF EXPORT SUBSIDY FOR SUGAR INDUSTRY

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ISSUES RELATED TO DIRECT AND INDIRECT FARM SUBSIDIES)

Union Commerce and Industry Minister's recently has announcement that the central government is not considering an extension of its export subsidy for the 2020-21 sugar season. The sugar industry has reacted strongly to it.

The industry has warned of a 'vertical collapse' in the sector due to excessive stock, whose ramification can be felt in the years to come.

Why is the sugar industry rooting for exports even before the start of the season?

At the start of the (October-November) sugar season, the industry draws up its balance-sheet and takes into consideration the expected production, the carry forward stock of last season, minus domestic consumption and exports, if any.

- This sugar balance-sheet determines the availability of sugar for the next season.
- In case of unusually high stock, ex-mill prices remain low for the present season as well as for the upcoming season, which result in liquidity crisis for the sugar sector.
- For the season, the annual production is estimated to be 326 lakh tonne (without any diversion towards ethanol), and the season has started with opening stock of 107 lakh tonne.

Why are mills reluctant to export sugar without a government subsidy?

The mills' reluctance stems from the gap between cost of manufacturing and the current price of raw sugar in international markets.

- Sugar contracts at international markets are trading at Rs 21-22 per kg, while the cost of production is at Rs 32.
- The price mismatch has ruled out any export prospects as this would lead to further loss for the mills.
- Ironically, mills are facing this problem at a time when Indian sugar has made its mark in the international markets.
- Other than the traditional markets of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, Indian mills have also shipped their produce to newer countries like Iran, China, South Korea and Somalia.

How did the mills manage to export sugar last season?

The record export level last season was possible only because of the subsidy programme offered by the central government.

- Mills were promised a transport subsidy of Rs 10.448 per kg of sugar exported.
- This subsidy had helped Mills Bridge the difference between production costs and international prices.
- A higher demand in international markets had also seen Indian mills reporting good exports.

Have last season's exports helped mills generate enough liquidity?

No. The central government is yet to release the export subsidy due to the mills and the total due is as high as Rs 6,900 crore.

- Individual mills had taken loans to facilitate exports and now they have to pay interest to the banks.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has further delayed the release of subsidy, which has led to many mills not having sufficient liquidity at the start of the season.

The ethanol production and the government's emphasis on the fuel additive

Recently, the central government has announced a Rs 1-3 per litre rise in the procurement price of ethanol.

- The industry has estimated that this year, nearly 20 lakh tonne of sugar will be diverted towards producing ethanol.
- Last year, the central government had announced an interest subvention scheme for mills to augment production of ethanol.
- But diversion to ethanol, although a much-needed move, will require time to materialise. With the present capacity, mills can produce 426 crore litres of ethanol, which would require diversion of 15-20 lakh tonnes of sugar.

Conclusion

While the government's move to encourage mills towards ethanol production is certainly welcome, it would require more capital and time.

For the current season, in case exports are not made viable, not only will India lose its market share, but mills will certainly feel the liquidity crunch. The effect of this will be disastrous for the sector.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 6th NOVEMBER – 2020

US LEAVING OF THE PARIS ACCORD

GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION)

On November, 4 the United States formally left the Paris Climate Agreement, three years after President Donald Trump announced his intention to undo what had been seen as a key achievement of his predecessor Barack Obama.

What is the Paris Agreement?

Paris Agreement is a historic international accord that brings almost 200 countries together in setting a common target to reduce global greenhouse emissions in an effort to fight climate change.

It was signed in In **December 2015** and the agreement came into force on November 4, 2016.

Highlights of the Agreement

- The pact seeks to **keep global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels**, and to try and limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- To this end, **each country has pledged to implement targeted action plans** that will limit their greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Agreement **asks rich and developed countries to provide financial and technological support to the developing world** in its quest to fight and adapt to climate change.

What is the Common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) principle?

A key feature of the Paris Agreement has been the way the agreement reflects the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR).

- **CBDR principle of international environmental law** establishing that all states are responsible for addressing global environmental destruction yet not equally responsible.
- The principle balances, on the one hand, **the need for all states to take responsibility for global environmental problems** and, on the other hand, **the need to recognize the wide differences in levels of economic development between states**.
- **These differences in turn are linked to the states' contributions to**, as well as their abilities to address, these problems.
- **CBDR was formalized in international law at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro.**

Why did the US leave the Paris agreement?

During his 2016 presidential campaign, **Donald Trump had described the Paris Agreement as "unfair" to US interests**, and had promised to pull out of the agreement if elected.

- So **in June 2017**, months after his inauguration, **Trump announced his government's decision to quit the accord.**
- **Environmentalists fiercely criticised the move**, saying that America's exit would seriously jeopardise the agreement's objective of keeping the global temperature rise to within 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times, especially since the **US was (and still is) the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases.**

Conditions for leaving the agreement

Article 28 of the Paris Agreement allows countries to leave the Paris Agreement and lays down the process for leaving.

- United Nations rules permitted **a country to apply for leaving three years after the accord came into force, i.e. November 4, 2019.**
- **The US could not immediately exit the Paris Agreement.** The US formally applied to leave on that day, and the departure automatically came into effect on November 4, 2020, **at the end of a mandatory year-long waiting period.**

If he wins, how can Joe Biden rejoin the Paris accord?

Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has long maintained that the **US should commit to policies addressing climate change**, and proposed a \$2 trillion spending plan that includes promoting clean energy and climate-friendly infrastructure.

- Biden has announced that upon election, **his administration would rejoin the Paris treaty on its first day in office– January 20, 2021.**
- **To do so, the US would have to formally inform** the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the body which created the Paris accord, about its intention to rejoin.
- **Thirty days after formally applying to the UNFCCC**, the US would again become a part of the Paris framework and would be required to submit its emission-reduction targets for 2030.

A possible American re-entry in the WHO

Apart from the Paris agreement, a **Biden administration is also widely expected to rejoin the World Health Organisation**, the UN's health arm which has played a guiding role for the world during the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Trump had announced Washington's intention to leave the WHO in May** this year after accusing the body of having undue deference to China.
- **The US, a founding member of the WHO as well as its biggest donor**, has long exercised a strong influence over the organisation.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 7th NOVEMBER – 2020

THE FORGOTTEN FACT OF CHINA-OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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

Following the abrogation of Article 370 and reorganisation of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a **China-Pakistan tandem has emerged to internationalise the issue**, including in the UN Security Council.

China's support for Pakistan is motivated by a desire to perpetuate its own territorial grab in the trans-Karakoram Shaksgam Tract of Kashmir.

China's stand on Gilgit-Baltistan issue

China treats the J&K issue as a **"bilateral dispute left over from history"** to be resolved between India and Pakistan.

- It has **turned a blind eye to the constitutional shenanigans by which Pakistan's** so-called federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan has acquired complete sway over Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- **It ignores Pakistan's agenda** of integrating Gilgit-Baltistan as its fifth province. Yet, China has the temerity **to question the establishment of the Union Territory of Ladakh** and to term it a 'unilateral' attempt to change "the status quo in the Kashmir region".
- China has **no locus standi to comment on India's internal affairs** since the erstwhile princely State of J&K acceded to India through the Instrument of Accession on October 26, 1947.

Chinese occupation of Kashmir's territory

The **Shaksgam valley in the trans-Karakoram tract**, part of PoK, was handed over on a platter by a supine Pakistan to China through an illegal border agreement on March 2, 1963.

- However, the **continuing Chinese occupation of Kashmir's territory does not find adequate mention in the contemporary discourse** surrounding this issue.
- China **occupies 5,180 square kilometres in the Shaksgam Valley** in addition to approximately **38,000 square kilometres in Aksai Chin**.
- China and Pakistan have colluded to obfuscate these facts, even as they brazenly promote the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** which runs through parts of Indian territory under their respective occupation.

History and underhand methods

Historically, **China played an insidious role** in changing the frontiers of Jammu and Kashmir through fictitious claims and unscrupulous alliances with local chieftains.

- China exploited the **'Great Game' between British India and Russia** in the late 19th century. It pitched territorial claims far beyond the traditional frontiers of Xinjiang.
- It gradually crept into areas in the **Taghdumbash Pamirs and the Karakorams**, well south of its frontier along **the Kun Lun mountains**.
- While the **British and the Russians were busy creating buffer zones** along the frontiers of **Xinjiang and Tibet**, China was systematically stepping into the void.
- **By the 1890s**, China had started asserting its presence in the valleys between the Kun Lun and the main Karakoram Range.

The traditional frontiers of the Maharaja of Kashmir

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The **British eroded the traditional frontiers of the Maharaja of Kashmir** in the region around Shahidullah and also those of his vassal, the **Mir of Hunza**.

- After the Mir's defeat in 1869 at the hands of the joint forces of the Maharaja and the British, the Chinese tried to co-opt him in their scheme while giving him refuge.
- Till then, the **Mir's authority, ranging in the Taghdumbash Pamirs till Dafdar and eastward in Raskam**, had never been contested by the Chinese.
- The **Chinese had started the practice of exchanging annual presents with the Mir of Hunza** in recognition of his authority over the unruly nomadic tribes that inhabited these valleys.
- The tradition of exchanging gifts with the Mir of Hunza was exploited to stake a retrospective claim to Hunza as a tributary of the **Qing empire since 1762 AD**.
- This **chicanery is contradicted by China's own historical accounts and maps of the 18th and the 19th centuries** which show the south-western frontiers of China extending barely up to the Kun Lun range.

Inherited region of India

By 1891, the **Chinese had quietly moved south of the Kun Lun range** to consolidate their presence at Shahidullah, which **earlier marked the furthest outpost of the princely state of J&K**.

- They **then moved further south to Suget**, and thereafter, showed up at the Karakoram pass.
- In 1936, the **Mir of Hunza was asked by the British to abandon his rights in the Taghdumbash Pamirs** as well as in the Raskam valley.
- But, the **Shaksgam valley to the south-west of Raskam and the Aghil range** remained with the Mir of Hunza.
- This remained the traditional frontier of British India until independence, **inherited by India following J&K's accession in 1947**.

The Pakistan connection

It is this border that was blatantly compromised by Pakistan in its so-called agreement with China on March 2, 1963.

- By **giving in to China's expansionist designs and spurious claims** to a boundary along the Karakoram range, **Pakistan compromised India's traditional frontier** along the Kun Lun range to the north-west of the Karakoram Pass.
- Pakistan also **enabled China to extrapolate a claim line** eastwards along the Karakoram range in Ladakh.
- This **collusion allowed China to claim the whole of Aksai Chin** in which it had no historical presence.

After the Partition

After the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, **from 1953, Chinese troops actively started transgressing the frontier in eastern Hunza.**

- **In October 1959**, they rustled some livestock from the area, prompting an angry response from Pakistan that it was determined to defend its frontiers.
- However, **President Ayub Khan**, spotting an opportunity in the rapidly deteriorating India-China ties in the late 1950s, **decided, instead, to pander to the Chinese.**
- **Pakistan deliberately chose to downgrade the historical claims of the Mir of Hunza** and eventually signed away the Shaksgam valley to China in 1963.

As party to the dispute

The provisional nature of the **territorial settlement between China and Pakistan is evident in Article 6 of the 1963 agreement.**

- **It clearly states that** *“the two Parties have agreed that after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India, the sovereign authority concerned will reopen negotiations with the Government of the People’s Republic of China, on the boundary as described in Article Two of the present Agreement, so as to sign a formal Boundary Treaty to replace the present agreement”.*
- In effect, **this agreement has established China as a party to the dispute.** It has a vested interest in legitimising its illegitimate gains in the trans-Karakoram tract.

Conclusion

The anniversary of the **Instrument of Accession, on October 26, is a reminder of China’s illegal territorial occupation.**

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 9th NOVEMBER – 2020

STATES OPTING FOR LEGISLATION ON ‘FREEDOM OF RELIGION’

GENERAL STUDIES - II (RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNION AND THE STATES)

Recently, the **Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and a Karnataka Minister** has indicated on enacting laws banning religious conversions for sake of marriage, and called it a ‘love jihad’.

Background

The **Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA)** was enacted to facilitate the **marriage of couples professing different faiths and preferring a civil wedding.** However, some practical problems arise in registering such marriages.

- The law's features on **prior public notice** being given and objections being called from any quarter **place a question mark on the safety and privacy of those intending to marry across religions.**
- Many settle for marriage under the personal law of one of them, with the other opting for religious conversion. Even **this option is now under threat.**
- The state Governments want to **ban conversion for the sole purpose of marriage.**

Key features of the Special Marriage Act (SMA)

- The marriage of any two persons may be solemnised under the SMA, subject to the **man having completed 21 years of age and the woman 18.**
- **Neither should have a spouse living;** both should be capable of giving **valid consent**, should not suffer from any **mental disorder** of a kind that renders them unfit for marriage and procreation.
- They **should not be within the degrees of prohibited relationship** — that is, they should not be related in such a way that their religion does not permit such marriages.
- Parties to an intended marriage **should give notice to the 'marriage officer' of the district** in which **one of them had resided for at least 30 days.**
- The notice will have to be entered in a **'Marriage Notice Book' and a copy of it displayed at a conspicuous place in the office.** The Notice Book is open for inspection at all reasonable times without a fee.
- Further, **if either of the parties is not a permanent resident of the district,** the marriage officer has to send a copy to his counterpart in the district where the party has permanent residence. **The notice shall be displayed in that district office too.**

Objections in the Act

The law also provides for objections to the marriage.

- **Any person can object to the marriage within 30 days** of the publication of the notice on the ground that it contravenes one of the conditions for a valid marriage.
- The **marriage officer has to inquire into the objection** and give a decision within 30 days.
- If he refuses permission for the marriage, **an appeal can be made to the district court.** **The court's decision will be final.**
- Also, the Act says that when a member of an **undivided family who professes Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jaina religions,** gets married under SMA, **it results in his or her "severance" from the family.**

What are the hurdles faced by couples?

The **provisions relating to notice, publication and objection have rendered it difficult for many people intending to solemnise inter-faith marriages.**

- Publicity in the local registration office may mean that family members objecting to the union may seek to stop it by coercion. In many cases, there may be a **threat to the lives of the applicants.**

- There have been reports of **right-wing groups opposed to inter-faith marriages** keeping a watch on the notice boards of marriage offices and threatened the concerned parties.
- **These provisions have been challenged in the Supreme Court** recently on the grounds that they violate the privacy of the couples, their dignity and right to marry.
- **In the case of Hindu and Muslim marriage laws**, there is **no requirement of prior notice** and, therefore, such a requirement in the SMA, say experts, **violates the right to equality** of those opting for marriage under it.

Other options for registration of inter-faith marriages

Many opt for inter-faith marriages through the **relevant law of the faith of one of the parties**. This will involve **one of them converting to the religion** professed by the other.

- While conversion to Islam and Christianity has formal means, **there is no prescribed ceremony for conversion to Hinduism**.
- **The Hindu Marriage Act is also applicable to** “any person who is a convert or re-convert to the Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina or Sikh religion”.

Are there laws against conversion for the sake of marriage?

Even though Chief Ministers of **Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka** have spoken about a separate enactment, at least **two States have legal provisions to the effect**.

- The **Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2019, and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018**, both prohibit conversion by misrepresentation, force, fraud, undue influence, inducement, allurement and ‘by marriage’.
- There is a separate section in both laws under which, **not conversion for the purpose of marriage, but marriage done solely for the purpose of conversion**, may be declared null and void by a family court based on a suit by either party.
- The **U.P. State Law Commission has recommended a similar Freedom of Religion law in the State** and favours a provision under which **marriages solemnised solely for conversion of one of the parties may be nullified by a family court**.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 10th NOVEMBER – 2020

THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIDEN WIN

GENERAL STUDIES - II (EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF OTHER COUNTRIES)

The presidential elections have been over and Joe Biden has been elected as United States’ 46th President. In India, lot of speculations and analysing is going on about the impact of a Joe Biden presidency on relations between the United States and India.

Prevalent speculations

Most commentators are saying **there will be little overall change and what there is might be marginally beneficial:**

- India will remain a potential ally in a troubled neighbourhood,
- Defence and counter-terrorism cooperation will continue as will trade negotiations, and
- There will be greater potential for cooperation on climate change.

Some are having the view that **there will be no more free passes for the Modi administration on human rights**, in particular the targeting of Muslims, Islam and Kashmir; and while the Biden presidency will raise these issues with Indian counterparts, they will not significantly impact on other areas of cooperation.

Spotting the nuance

Contrary to the Bharatiya Janata Party's projection, **U.S.-India ties did not strengthen under the Modi-Trump administrations** (Mr. Trump weakened the U.S.'s ties to most countries, and India was no exception).

While U.S.-India ties really did display strength was during the **Singh-Obama administrations**. At that moment, **India was no longer a potential ally for the U.S.; it was an ally**, period.

Earlier effort to make good relations

Since the Cold War ended, **the two countries have stressed common interests**. But the process of outlining and acting upon these interests has been frustratingly slow.

- The **first breakthroughs came during the Clinton-Vajpayee years**, but they were in the nature of 'getting to know each other'.
- **Manmohan Singh's** willingness to stake his entire political capital on the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement made U.S. policymakers sit up. But the timing was off.
- **The Bush administration** depended on Pakistani cooperation for its war in Afghanistan, and India's importance was mostly as a lever to pressure Pakistan.
- The chief progress was in trade, and it was considerable, with U.S.-India trade hitting close to \$40 billion.

The Obama era

It was only when Mr. Obama was elected President in 2009, with Mr. Biden as Vice-President, that ties truly deepened.

Between 2009 and 2014-

- U.S.-India trade nearly doubled,
- The U.S. agreed on a strategic partnership with India,
- Supported India for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers Group,
- Helped it become a member of the East Asia summit,
- Promoted Indian engagement in Afghanistan and opening to Central Asia,
- Encouraged the European Union to engage more closely with India, and

- Strengthened military to military ties in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indo-US relations: Post-2014

When the **Modi administration came to power**, most of these initiatives whittled down, including even counter-terrorism cooperation.

- U.S. military strategists were surprised by the **weakness of India's 'surgical strikes'** on Pakistan in 2016 and 2019.
- This year, they were astonished by the **Modi administration's quiescence on Chinese intrusions into Ladakh**, arguably the gravest security threat to India since the 1962 Sino-Indian war.
- While the **U.S. military will continue such important symbolic gestures as joint exercises** with the Indian military, few U.S. strategists see India as a major security asset in Asia.
- Even **trade**, though it continued to grow between 2014-2019, grew at a slower rate than in the preceding five years.

A time of value sharing

In other words, the **high points of the U.S.-India relationship occurred when both countries were governed by liberal democrats.**

- **Values do matter**, despite what purported realists say. Indeed, they matter so much that when two countries share common values, the benefits accrue to the ordinary citizen.
- Manmohan Singh's administration may take the greatest share of credit for lifting hundreds of millions of Indians into the middle class, but it is also true that he was aided by the Obama administration's support for his cause.

Issue of rights and a message

Clearly, the **Biden and Modi administrations will not share common values.** While this gap may not directly impact U.S.-India ties, it will surely do so indirectly.

India is not high on the Biden-Harris list of priorities. They include in their priorities:

- dealing with COVID-19,
- healing domestic divides,
- reviving the U.S. economy,
- repairing ties with Europe,
- evolving a calibrated China policy,
- re-joining multilateral initiatives such as on climate change,
- reinstating the Obama-era Iran policy and
- Furthering peace-making in Afghanistan.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has driven so many economies inwards and virtually devastated our own, a **U.S.-India business as usual approach will not help.**

We need countries that will actively work with us to revive our economy, even if their own benefit is less than ours.

A last takeaway

Our judiciary and media can draw their own lessons from the U.S. example, where so many State-level courts and the national media fought back against Mr. Trump's attempts to cow them.

They paved the way for this election result. And for those of us members of civil society who care, here is the comforting Biden-Harris message: all is not lost, it never can be.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 11th NOVEMBER – 2020

GST COMPENSATION

GENERAL STUDIES - III (INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND ISSUES ARISING FROM IT.)

After Puducherry, Congress-ruled Rajasthan last week became the latest Opposition-ruled state **to opt for a special borrowing window for meeting its compensation shortfall** under Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Other dissenting states — **Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand** — **are yet to join any of the borrowing options floated by the central government** to resolve the issue of compensation deficit in the current financial year.

What is the special window for borrowing?

The Finance Ministry had said that the **Centre would borrow from the market and then act as an intermediary** to arrange back-to-back loans to pay the GST compensation shortfall of Rs 1.1 lakh crore to state governments.

This arrangement will not reflect in the fiscal deficit of the Centre, and will appear as capital receipts for state governments.

GST revenue shortfall

The total **GST revenue shortfall for the current fiscal was estimated at Rs 3 lakh crore**, of which compensation cess collection was estimated at Rs 65,000 crore.

- It leaves a **compensation deficit of Rs 2.35 lakh crore**.
- Of this Rs 2.35 lakh crore, **Rs 1.1 lakh crore has been estimated as shortfall on account of GST implementation**, while the rest is being estimated as the impact of the pandemic.

Options given to the states

In August, the Centre gave two options to the states —

1. Either borrow Rs 97,000 crore from a special window facilitated by the RBI, or
2. Borrow Rs 2.35 lakh crore from the market.

The options have since been revised to Rs 1.10 lakh crore and Rs 1.8 lakh crore, respectively.

Why could states not borrow instead of the Centre enabling the borrowing?

The earlier proposal was for a special window to be facilitated by the RBI and the Centre, but states would have had to tap the window separately.

- One of the primary concerns for that mechanism was that states, even if divided into groups, would have tapped the market for borrowing separately.
- It would be leading to differential rates with a wide variance in interest rates between the states with more debt and those with less debt.
- Also, the yields for state development loans (SDLs), which is the tool for market borrowing by states, are generally at a premium, higher than the yield on the central government's government securities.
- So, it would have been costlier for states to borrow rather than the Centre borrowing at a uniform rate and then passing it on to them as a back-to-back loan.

How has the scheme progressed so far?

Under the special window, the Centre has already borrowed Rs 12,000 crore in two equal instalments and passed it on to 21 states and three Union Territories on October 23 and November 2.

The second round of borrowing was done at an interest of 4.42%, and the first round at 5.19%, lower than the cost of borrowing for states.

- Out of the Rs 12,000 crore, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat have received Rs 1,872 crore, Rs 1,808 crore and Rs 1,391 crore, respectively.
- With Rajasthan joining in, 22 states and three UTs have opted for the borrowing under the special window proposed by the Centre to meet the Rs 1.83 lakh crore shortfall in GST revenue.
- The ministry intends to release Rs 6,000 crore to the states every week.

Way forward

The Finance Ministry is now engaged in dialogue with the opposing states to join the scheme.

- Economists say the borrowing issue has only been resolved for the compensation shortfall for this fiscal and it remains to be seen how this issue will be resolved for the next fiscal.
- Given that tax revenues are expected to grow at a lower rate than the 14% growth guaranteed to states under the compensation mechanism of GST.
- "Bigger question is what is going to happen in FY2022.
- Whether the Finance Commission will come out with some roadmap such that cess collection is not sufficient for 14% compensation.

TECHNICAL RECESSION

GENERAL STUDIES - III (INDIAN ECONOMY)

In its latest monthly bulletin — for November — the Reserve Bank of India has dedicated a chapter on the “State of the economy”. **The idea is to provide a monthly snapshot of some of the key indicators of India’s economic health.**

What is the ‘Nowcast’ released by RBI?

The RBI has started “nowcasting” or “the prediction of the present or the very near future of the state of the economy”.

- And the **very first “nowcast” predicts that India’s economy will contract by 8.6%** in the second quarter (July, August, September) of the current financial year.
- This pace of contraction is considerably slower than the 23.9% decline in the real gross domestic product (GDP) during the first quarter (April, May, June).
- The contraction of Q2 is crucial because **it implies India that has entered a “technical recession” in the first half of 2020-21— for the first time in its history.**

To better understand the term “technical recession”, one must distinguish it from two other phrases — a recession and a recessionary phase of an economy.

What is a recessionary phase?

At its simplest, in any economy, **a recessionary phase is the counterpart of an expansionary phase.**

- In other words, when the GDP — **increases from one quarter (or month) to another,** the economy is said to be in an **expansionary phase.**
- And when the GDP contracts from one quarter to another, the economy is said to be in a recessionary phase.

Together, **these two phases create what is called a “business cycle”** in any economy.

How is a recession different?

When a recessionary phase sustains for long enough, it is called a recession.

- In other words, when the GDP contracts for a long enough period, the economy is said to be in a recession.
- There is, however, **no universally accepted definition of a recession** — as in, for how long should the GDP contract before an economy is said to be in a recession.
- **According to National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER),** “During a recession, a significant decline in economic activity spreads across the economy and can last from a few months to more than a year”.

What is a technical recession?

A “technical recession” is **when an economy have two negative quarters of GDP**, but it is due mainly to slowing growth or an isolated event rather than a major underlying cause.

Technical recessions are **usually short in duration and mild in severity**.

The real quarterly GDP has come to be accepted as a measure of economic activity and a **“benchmark” for ascertaining a “technical recession”**.

- **By this definition**, India entered a recession at the end of September.
- The UK is in its third quarter of recession.
- Brazil and Indonesia are also in recession while South Africa has evaded it until now, but only marginally.
- China, where the pandemic began, has bucked the trend.

How long do recessions last?

- Typically, **recessions last for a few quarters**. If they **continue for years**, they are referred to as **“depressions”**.
- But a depression is quite rare; the last one was during the 1930s in the US.

Conclusion

In the current scenario, the **key determinant for any economy to come out of recession is to control the spread of Covid-19**.

In India’s case, Finance Minister has expressed hope that **India’s recession could be already over** and that the economy may register positive growth in the current quarter.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 17th NOVEMBER – 2020

THREAT OR TREAT: ON RCEP TRADE DEAL

GENERAL STUDIES - II (REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS)

On Sunday, 15 countries solidified their participation in the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**. Even as India opted to stay out after walking out of discussions last year, the new trading bloc has made it clear that the door will remain open for India to return to the negotiating table.

What is RCEP?

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is being described as the “largest” regional trading agreement to this day.

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- It was **originally being negotiated between 16 countries — 10 ASEAN members and 6 countries** with which they have free trade agreements (FTAs), namely **Australia, China, Korea, Japan, New Zealand and India**.
- **The purpose of RCEP** was to make it easier for products and services of each of these countries to be available across this region.
- Negotiations to chart out this deal had been on since 2013, and India was expected to be a signatory until its decision last November.

India's walk out from RCEP

On November 4, 2019, India decided to exit discussions over **"significant outstanding issues"**.

- India had been **"consistently" raising "fundamental issues" and concerns** throughout the negotiations.
- It was prompted to walk out as the **issues raised had not been resolved** by the deadline to commit to signing the deal.
- **Its decision was to safeguard the interests of industries like agriculture and dairy** and to give an advantage to the country's services sector.

How far is China's presence a factor?

Escalating tensions with China are a major reason for India's decision.

- While **China's participation in the deal had already been proving difficult for India due to various economic threats**, the clash at Galwan Valley has soured relations between the two countries.
- The **various measures India has taken to reduce its exposure to China** would have sat uncomfortably with its commitments under RCEP.

Inadequate protections

Major issues that were unresolved during RCEP negotiations were related to the exposure that India would have to China.

- This included India's fears that there were **"inadequate" protections against surges in imports**.
- It felt there could also be a **possible circumvention of rules of origin**— the criteria used to determine the national source of a product — **in the absence of which some countries could dump their products** by routing them through other countries that enjoyed lower tariffs.
- **India was unable to ensure countermeasures** like an auto-trigger mechanism to raise tariffs on products when their imports crossed a certain threshold.

Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) obligations

India also wanted RCEP to **exclude most-favoured nation (MFN) obligations** from the investment chapter.

- It did not want to hand out, **especially to countries with which it has border disputes**, the benefits it was giving to strategic allies or for geopolitical reasons.

- India felt the agreement would force it to extend benefits given to other countries for sensitive sectors like defence to all RCEP members.
- RCEP also **lacked clear assurance over market access issues in countries such as China** and non-tariff barriers on Indian companies.

What can the decision cost India?

There are concerns that **India's decision would impact its bilateral trade ties with RCEP member nations**, as they may be more inclined to focus on bolstering economic ties within the bloc.

- The move could potentially leave India with **less scope to tap the large market that RCEP presents** — as the countries involved account for over 2 billion of the world's population.
- However, India's stance on the deal also comes as a result of learnings **from unfavourable trade balances** that it has with several RCEP members, with some of which it even has FTAs.
- **India has trade deficits with 11 of the 15 RCEP countries**, and some experts feel that India has been unable to leverage its existing bilateral free trade agreements with several RCEP members to increase exports.

What are India's options now?

India, as an original negotiating participant of RCEP, **has the option of joining the agreement without having to wait 18 months** as stipulated for new members in the terms of the pact.

- **RCEP signatory states said** they plan to commence negotiations with India once it submits a request of its intention to join the pact "in writing", and it may participate in meetings as an observer prior to its accession.
- However, the possible alternative that **India may be exploring is reviews of its existing bilateral FTAs with some of these RCEP members** as well as newer agreements with other markets with potential for Indian exports. Over 20 negotiations are underway.

Conclusion

India currently **has agreements with members like the ASEAN bloc, South Korea and Japan and is negotiating agreements with members like Australia and New Zealand.**

There is also a growing view that it **would serve India's interest to invest strongly in negotiating bilateral agreements with the US and the EU**, both currently a work in progress.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 18th NOVEMBER – 2020

ARTICLE 32 AND SUPREME COURT

GENERAL STUDIES- II (FUNCTIONING OF THE JUDICIARY)

Recently, a Supreme Court Bench headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde observed that it is **“trying to discourage” individuals from filing petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution.**

The observation came during the hearing of a petition seeking the release of journalist Siddique Kappan, who was arrested with three others while on their way to Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, to report on an alleged gangrape and murder.

What is Article 32?

It is **one of the fundamental rights** listed in the Constitution that each citizen is entitled.

- **Article 32 deals with the ‘Right to Constitutional Remedies’,** or affirms the right to move the Supreme Court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of the rights conferred in Part III of the Constitution.
- **It states that the Supreme Court** *“shall have power to issue directions or orders or writs, including writs in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari, whichever may be appropriate, for the enforcement of any of the rights conferred by this Part”.*
- The **right guaranteed by this Article** *“shall not be suspended* except as otherwise provided for by this Constitution”.

Background of Article 32

The Article is included in **Part III of the Constitution with other fundamental rights** including to Equality, Freedom of Speech and Expression, Life and Personal Liberty, and Freedom of Religion.

Only if any of these fundamental rights is violated can a person can approach the Supreme Court directly under Article 32.

- During the Constituent Assembly debates in December 1948, a discussion on this fundamental right **Dr B R Ambedkar had said**, “If I was asked to name any particular Article in this Constitution as the most important — an Article without which this Constitution would be a nullity — I could not refer to any other Article except this one. **It is the very soul of the Constitution and the very heart of it...**”
- He said the **rights invested with the Supreme Court through this Article could not be taken away unless the Constitution itself is amended.**
- Hence it was **“one of the greatest safeguards** that can be provided for the safety and security of the individual”.
- ‘It is a **right fundamental to all the fundamental rights’** guaranteed under the Constitution.
- **This Article cannot be suspended except during the period of Emergency.**

Can High Courts be approached in cases of violation of fundamental rights?

Both the **High Courts** and the **Supreme Court** can be approached for violation or enactment of fundamental rights **through five kinds of writs**:

1. **Habeas corpus** (related to personal liberty in cases of illegal detentions and wrongful arrests)
2. **Mandamus** — directing public officials, governments, courts to perform a statutory duty;
3. **Quo warrant** — to show by what warrant is a person holding public office;
4. **Prohibition** — directing judicial or quasi-judicial authorities to stop proceedings which it has no jurisdiction for; and
5. **Certiorari** — re-examination of an order given by judicial, quasi-judicial or administrative authorities.

In civil or criminal matters, the first remedy available to an aggrieved person is that of trial courts, followed by an appeal in the High Court and then the Supreme Court.

- **When it comes to violation of fundamental rights, an individual can approach the High Court under Article 226 or the Supreme Court directly under Article 32.**
- Article 226, however, is not a fundamental right like Article 32.

Supreme Court's recent observations on Article 32

In the **case of the journalist Siddique Kappan**, the court asked why the petitioners could not go to the High Court.

In **another case last week invoking Article 32**, filed by a **Nagpur-based man arrested in three cases for alleged defamatory content against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and others**, the same Bench directed him to approach the High Court first.

Relief under Article 32 was also sought in a petition filed by Telugu poet Varavara Rao's wife, P Hemalatha, against the conditions of his detention in jail since 2018.

The **Supreme Court directed the Bombay High Court to expedite the hearing** on a bail plea filed on medical grounds, pending since September.

Different observation in Arnab Goswami case

In another matter, the Bench of CJI Bobde, had issued a contempt notice to the Assistant Secretary of the Maharashtra Assembly who, in a letter to **Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami**, had questioned him for approaching the top court against the breach-of-privilege notice.

- **The court had then said that the right to approach the Supreme Court under Article 32 is itself a fundamental right.**
- and that “there is no doubt that if a citizen of India is deterred in any case from approaching this Court in exercise of his right under Article 32 of the Constitution of India,

it would amount to a serious and direct interference in the administration of justice in the country”.

Supreme Court's other observations over the years on Article 32?

- In **Romesh Thappar vs State of Madras (1950)**, the Supreme Court observed that Article 32 provides a “guaranteed” remedy for the enforcement of fundamental rights.
- “This Court is thus constituted the protector and guarantor of fundamental rights, and it cannot, consistently with the responsibility so laid upon it, refuse to entertain applications seeking protection against infringements of such rights.”
- **During the Emergency, in Additional District Magistrate, Jabalpur vs S S Shukla (1976)**, the Supreme Court had said that the citizen loses his right to approach the court under Article 32.

Conclusion

Constitutional experts say that **it is eventually at the discretion of the Supreme Court** and each individual judge to decide whether an intervention is warranted in a case, which could also be heard by the High Court first.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 19th NOVEMBER – 2020

DEEMED FORESTS

GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION)

Recently, the Karnataka Forest Minister announced in the Assembly that the state government would soon **declassify 6.64 lakh hectares of the 9.94 lakh hectares of deemed forests** in the state (nearly 67%) and hand it over to Revenue authorities.

- The move has been taken after **a study of the actual extent of deemed forest areas by local committees** headed by officials from the Revenue, Forest and Land Records Departments in every district.
- The issue of **deemed forests is a contentious one in Karnataka**, with legislators across party lines often **alleging that large amounts of agriculture and non-forest land are “unscientifically” classified** as such.

What are deemed forests?

While the **concept of deemed forests has not been clearly defined in any law** including the **Forest Conservation Act of 1980**.

The **Supreme Court in the case of T N Godavarman Thirumalpad (1996)** accepted a wide definition of forests under the Act.

- “The word ‘forest’ must be understood according to its dictionary meaning. **This description covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise for the purpose of Section 2 (1) of the Forest Conservation Act,**” the Supreme Court said in its December 12, 1996 order.
- “The term ‘**forest land**’ occurring in Section 2 will not only include ‘forest’ as understood in the dictionary sense, but also any areas recorded as forest in the government record irrespective of the ownership.
- **The provisions enacted in the Forest Conservation Act 1980** for the conservation of forest and the matters connected therewith **must apply clearly to all forest** so understood irrespective of the ownership or classification thereof,”.

‘Deemed Forests’ as per Expert Committee

An **expert committee constituted by the Karnataka government after the Supreme Court order** identified ‘deemed forests’ as **“Land having the characteristic of forests irrespective of the ownership”**.

According to the Committee-

Thickly wooded areas of the Revenue Department not handed over to the Forest Department; **thickly wooded areas recommended to be handed over to the Forest Department**; **thickly wooded land distributed to grantees but not cultivated**; and **thickly wooded plantations of the Forest Department could all be ‘deemed forests’**.

Demands to reclassify

A **deemed forest fits “dictionary meaning” of a forest, “irrespective of ownership”**.

Amidst **claims that the move hit farmers**, as well as barred large tracts from mining, the state has been arguing that the classification was done without taking into account needs of people.

The land in Karnataka is protected under the Forest Act?

Reports by expert committees in 1997 and 2002 identified **43.18 lakh hectares of forest land for conservation in Karnataka**, which included **33.23 lakh hectares notified forest area** as per forest records and **9.94 lakh hectares ‘deemed forests’**.

Why does the Karnataka government want to release 6.64 lakh hectares of deemed forests?

In 2014, the then Congress government decided to have a relook at the categorisation of forests. **It said some of the ‘statutory forests’ had been wrongly classified as ‘deemed forest’ by the expert committee** constituted after the Supreme Court order.

- The **subjective classification in turn resulted in conflicts between** the Forest Department and other departments like Revenue, Irrigation, Public Works and Energy, the government argued.
- Ministers have also argued that land was randomly classified as deemed forest by officials, **causing hardship to farmers in some areas**.

- There is **also a commercial demand for mining in some regions designated as deemed forests.**

The Way Forward

Preservation of forest areas in India under the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980** has been continuously **monitored by the Supreme Court** since the Godavarman case judgment in 1996.

- The state government must obtain clearances from the Supreme Court for affecting changes to land classified as deemed forests since the verdict, said officials of the Forest, Ecology and Environment department in Karnataka.
- In 2019, the state had filed an interim application in the Supreme Court for exclusion of 5.18 lakh.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 21st NOVEMBER – 2020

TIBETANS PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE

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

Over 1.3 lakh Tibetans living in exile and settled across India and other parts of the globe shall be electing their next Parliament-in-Exile, called **Central Tibetan Administration, and its head** in May 2021.

- According to the **Green Book of the Tibetan government-in-exile**, over 1 lakh Tibetans are settled across India, while the remaining are settled in United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Mongolia, Germany, United Kingdom, Switzerland and various other countries.
- The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPiE) has **its headquarters in Dharamsala, in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.**

Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPiE)

The Speaker and a Deputy Speaker head the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile.

The 16th TPiE had 45 members –

- 10 representatives from each of the **traditional provinces of Tibetan – U-Tsang, Dhotoe and Dhomey;**
- Two from each of **the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism** and the **pre-Buddhist Bon religion;**
- Two representing each of the **Tibetan Communities in North America and Europe;** and
- **One from Australasia and Asia** (excluding India, Nepal and Bhutan).

Till 2006, it used to be called as **Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPDs)** with the **chairman as its head and a vice-chairman.**

It was changed later to **Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile headed by a Speaker and Deputy Speaker**.

Tibetan Constitution

The Central Tibetan Administration exists and functions on the basis of the Constitution of the Tibetan government called the '**The Charter of the Tibetans in Exile**'.

- In 1991, The **Constitution Redrafting Committee** instituted by the Dalai Lama prepared the Charter for Tibetans in exile. The Dalai Lama approved it on June 28, 1991.
- **Till 2001**, the Dalai Lama used to suggest **three names for each post of Kalon (minister in the Cabinet)** and the Assembly selected one each.
- **Kalon Tripa (the Central Tibetan Administration's head)** used to be elected from among the selected Kalons.

Changes in the Charter

In 2001, fundamental changes happened with the **amendment of the Charter that facilitated direct election of the Kalon Tripa** by the Tibetans in exile.

- The directly elected Kalon Tripa then nominated the Kalons with subsequent approval of the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile.
- On March 14, 2011, the **Dalai Lama devolved his political leadership and the Charter was again amended**.
- The **political leadership was transferred to Kalon Tripa** who was called Sikyong or president of the Central Tibetan Administration.

The 2021 elections

The 2021 elections will be held to elect the president and 45 members of the TPiE.

- According to the **CTA's Election Commission**, nearly 80,000 Tibetans living outside Tibet have registered for voting so far, including roughly 56,000 living in India and 24,000 in other countries.
- One last round of registration is pending, and any Tibetan aged above 18 as per **one's identity document called Tibetan Green Book** is eligible to vote following registration.
- Only Tibetans living outside the subcontinent will elect their MPs based on their current geographic location.

Who all are in the fray for Sikyong's post?

Although the **Tibetan Election Commission will finally nominate two main candidates** in the first round of elections (January 3, 2021) who shall contest for the post of Sikyong in the second round (April 13).

There are **eight candidates who are among the front runners** from across the world.

The Kashag (Cabinet)

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

The Kashag (Cabinet) is Central Tibetan Administration's highest executive office and comprise seven members.

- It is **headed by the Sikyong (political leader)** who is directly elected by the exiled Tibetan population.
- Sikyong, subsequently **nominates his seven Kalons (ministers)** and seeks the parliament's approval.
- The Kashag's **term is for five years**.

Is TPiE officially recognised by any country?

Not exactly, it is **not recognised officially by any country, including India**.

- But, **a number of countries including the United States of America and European nations deal directly with the Sikyong and other Tibetan leaders** through various forums.
- The TPiE claims its democratically-elected character helps it manage Tibetan affairs and raise the Tibetan issue across the world.

The incumbent Sikyong, Lobsang Sangay, was among the guests who attended the oath-taking ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2014, probably a first.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 23rd NOVEMBER – 2020

PROTESTS AGAINST BRU RESETTLEMENT IN TRIPURA

GENERAL STUDIES - I (REGIONALISM)

The situation in Tripura's Kanchanpur and Panisagar areas remains tense after protests against the planned resettlement of thousands of Bru migrants permanently at Kanchanpur sub-division of North Tripura turned violent recently.

What is the Issue?

Twenty-three years after **ethnic clashes in Mizoram** forced 37,000 people of the **Bru (or Reang) community to flee their homes to neighbouring Tripura**.

- **An agreement** was signed in January this year to allow 32,000 of them remaining in the camps to permanently settle in the state.
- This agreement, however, **was not welcomed by the Bengali and Mizo communities in Tripura**.
- They claim **settling thousands of migrants permanently at Kanchanpur sub-division of North Tripura would lead to a demographic imbalance**, exert pressure on local resources and potentially lead to law and order problems.

Who are protesting?

The protests which started with memoranda, demonstration and press conferences of a newly formed organisation called the **Nagarik Suraksha Mancha**.

- **Mizo Convention**, a local ethnic organisation, has paired up with the Mancha to create a platform called **Joint Movement Committee (JMC)** and proclaimed that not more than 1,500 Bru families would be allowed to settle at Kanchanpur.
- Over the past 10 months, **the state has planned 12 resettlement spots across six districts of Tripura with 300 families each.**
- Six of these spots were proposed to be set up at **Kanchanpur sub-division alone, a move opposed by the JMC.**

The January agreement

The centre, in January 2020, signed a historic **pact for permanent solution of Bru refugees' issue.**

The agreement was between **Union Government, Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang** representatives to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.

Highlights of the agreement:

- Under the agreement, the centre has announced a package of Rs. 600 crore under this agreement.
- As per the agreement the Bru tribes would be given land to reside in Tripura.
- A fixed deposit of Rs. 4 lakh will be given to each family as an amount of government aid. They will be able to withdraw this amount after two years.
- Each of the displaced families will be given 40×30 sq ft residential plots.
- Apart from them, each family will be given Rs. 5,000 cash per month for two years.
- The agreement highlights that each displaced family will also be given free ration for two years and aid of Rs. 1.5 lakh to build their houses.

Who are the Brus?

The Bru or Reang are a community **indigenous to Northeast India, living mostly in Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam.**

In Tripura, they are recognised as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).**

- Over two decades ago, **they were targeted by the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zirwlai Pawl (MZP),** and a few ethnic social organisations of Mizoram who demanded that the Bru be excluded from electoral rolls in the state.
- In October 1997, **following ethnic clashes, nearly 37,000 Bru fled Mizoram's Mamit, Kolasib, and Lunglei districts to Tripura,** where they were sheltered in relief camps.
- Since then, over 5,000 have returned to Mizoram in nine phases of repatriation, while 32,000 people still live in six relief camps in North Tripura.

IN VACCINE RACE LAST LAP, THE KEY STEPS FOR INDIA

GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO HEALTH)

Evaluation of candidate vaccines for COVID-19 should be done on technical parameters and programmatic suitability.

Characteristics of an Ideal Vaccine

An ideal vaccine would provide all of these —

- Immunity that is of a high degree (90% + protective especially against severe illness),
- Broad scale (against different variants) and durable (at least five years if not lifelong);
- A vaccine that is safe (little or no side-effects and definitely no serious adverse effects);
- A vaccine that is cheap (similar to current childhood vaccines);
- A vaccine that is programmatically suitable (single dose, can be kept at room temperature or at worst needs simple refrigeration between 2°C and 4°C), needle-free delivery, and
- A vaccine that is available in multidose vials, has long shelf life and is amenable to rapid production.

A difficult vaccine to develop

Historically, we have faced difficulties in the development of coronavirus vaccines.

- Although there were **some attempts at development of vaccines against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)**, there are no licensed vaccines for any coronavirus yet.
- Previous coronavirus vaccines were found to be immunogenic (generate antibodies as in phase II) but did not effectively prevent acquisition of disease (phase III).
- **It fuels a concern** that vaccination may not induce long-lived immunity, and re-infection may be possible.

Most could be in two doses

The COVID-19 vaccine candidates by **Moderna and Pfizer** have already released early information of high effectiveness (90%+).

- **Pfizer's two-dose shots need to be stored at minus 70°C**, something which is beyond India's current vaccine storage infrastructure.
- **Moderna's vaccine is more thermostable** and has a requirement similar to what we used for oral polio vaccines.
- **AstraZeneca**, also a frontrunner, makes use of simplified storage settings as do many other candidates.

As results of phase 3 trials of other vaccines are out, we will be faced with a dilemma of choice (referred to earlier). **Almost all of them seem to require two doses.**

Given this complicated scenario, what should the government strategy be while choosing a vaccine and for vaccination?

Ranking by risk category

The first rule would be to not to put all your eggs in one basket. The government has planned for vaccine supply from different sources.

- The second rule would be to prioritise.
- The World Health Organization has issued guidelines for prioritisation for vaccine recipients.
- For this, **we need to rank population sub-groups by risk category** (risk of infection or adverse outcome or economic impact).
- **The programmatic ease of vaccination** — based on their captivity (health-care workers, organised sector, workplace, schools), and access to existing channels of vaccination (pregnant women and children).

Models of social mobilisation

Problems will arise as we move towards vaccinating the general population, even high-risk groups (the elderly and those with co-morbidity) in the general population.

- It might be easier to vaccinate the institutionalised elderly as compared to community-dwelling ones.
- It is essential that we avoid overcrowding during vaccination.

Challenges in vaccination

The greatest challenge would be to immunise the poorest and the most vulnerable (slums/migrants/refugees/people with disabilities).

- **Because of access issues**, this must be by an outreach or camp approach (booths along with web-enabled appointments facilitated by civil society).
- We have learnt major lessons through social mobilisation efforts during the Pulse Polio campaigns, Aadhaar card enrolment and elections, which will serve as good models.
- For the **pandemic to end, we need not have to immunise everybody.**
- It is expected that the **pandemic would start receding once we protect about 60% of the population.**

Dealing with 'pay and get'

One major challenge would be that **many people would be willing to pay for the vaccine and ask for expedited access.**

- It can and should allow the vaccine to be available in the private sector at a market-driven price for such people.
- It will be **ethical as well as cost-saving for the government, if it does not divert vaccines from the government-driven programme.**

- Let the decision to wait for a government-delivered vaccine or one from the private sector be made by individuals, and not the government.
- It will also free the government to focus more on “needy” people.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 25th NOVEMBER – 2020

CORPORATE HOUSES IN INDIAN BANKING: RBI RECOMMENDATION

GENERAL STUDIES - III (INDIAN ECONOMY)

A recent report by an **Internal Working Group (IWG)** of the Reserve Bank of India has attracted a lot of attention as well as criticism.

The IWG was constituted to “**review extant ownership guidelines and corporate structure for Indian private sector banks**” and submitted its report last week.

Background

The banking system in any country is of critical importance for sustaining economic growth.

- India’s banking system has changed a lot since Independence when banks were owned by the private sector, resulting in a “**large concentration of resources in the hands of a few business families**”.
- The government **resorted to the nationalisation of banks in 1969 (14 banks) and again in 1980 (6 banks)** to achieve “a wider spread of bank credit, prevent its misuse, direct a larger volume of credit flow to priority sectors and to make it an effective instrument of economic development”.
- **With economic liberalisation in the early 1990s**, the economy’s credit needs grew and private banks re-entered the picture. As Chart 1 shows, this had a salutary impact on credit growth.

Current scenario of banking in India

However, **even after three decades of rapid growth**, the total balance sheet of banks in India still constitutes less than 70 per cent of the GDP.

- It is **much less compared to global peers** such as China, where this ratio is closer to 175%.
- Moreover, **domestic bank credit to the private sector is just 50% of GDP** when in economies such as China, Japan, the US and Korea it is upwards of 150 per cent.
- In other words, India’s banking system has been struggling to meet the credit demands of a growing economy.
- **There is only one Indian bank in the top 100 banks globally** by size. Further, Indian banks are also one of the least cost-efficient.

Why was the IWG constituted?

It is in this background that the IWG was **asked to suggest changes that not only boost private sector banking but also make it safer.**

- The internal working group set up by the RBI has proposed **to raise the cap on promoters' stake in private banks from the current 15 % to 26 % in 15 years.**
- The group has also recommended that **large corporate or industrial houses may be allowed as promoters of banks only after amendments to the Banking Regulation Act** and strengthening of the supervisory mechanism for conglomerates, including consolidated supervision.

Criticism

Historically, **RBI has been of the view that the ideal ownership status of banks** should promote a balance between efficiency, equity and financial stability.

- A greater play of **private banks is not without its risks.** The global financial crisis of 2008 was a case in point.
- A **predominantly government-owned banking system tends to be more financially stable** because of the trust in government as an institution.
- **The main concern in allowing large corporates — that is,** business houses having total assets of Rs 5,000 crore or more, where the non-financial business of the group accounts for more than 40% in terms of total assets or gross income — **to open their own banks is a basic conflict of interest, or more technically, “connected lending”.**

What is connected lending?

Simply put, **connected lending refers to a situation where the promoter of a bank is also a borrower** and, as such, **it is possible for a promoter to channel the depositors' money into their own ventures.**

- **Connected lending has been happening for a long time** and the RBI has been always behind the curve in spotting it.
- The recent episodes in ICICI Bank, Yes Bank, DHFL etc. were all examples of connected lending.

The rationale behind these recommendations

The Indian economy, especially the private sector, needs money (credit) to grow.

- Far from being able to extend credit, **the government-owned banks are struggling to contain their non-performing assets.**
- Government finances **were already strained before the Covid crisis.** With growth faltering, revenues have plummeted and the **government has limited ability to push for growth through the public sector banks.**
- **Large corporates, with deep pockets, are the ones with the financial resources to fund India's future growth.**

Conclusion

India's **banking sector needs reform but corporate houses owning banks hardly qualifies as one**. If the record of over-leveraging in the corporate world in recent years is anything to go by, the entry of corporate houses into banking is the road to perdition.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 27th NOVEMBER – 2020

NEGATIVE-YIELD BONDS

GENERAL STUDIES - III (INDIAN ECONOMY)

Recently, China sold negative-yield debt for the first time, and this saw a **high demand from investors across Europe**.

- As **yields in Europe are even lower**, there was a **huge demand** for the 4-billion-euro bonds issued by China.
- **China's 5-year bond was priced** with a yield of -0.152% , and the 10-year and 15-year securities with positive yields of 0.318% and 0.664% .

What are negative-yield bonds?

These are **debt instruments that offer to pay the investor a maturity amount lower than the purchase price of the bond**.

These are **generally issued by central banks or governments**, and **investors pay interest to the borrower to keep their money with them**.

- A negative bond yield is when an investor receives less money at the bond's maturity than the original purchase price for the bond.
- A negative bond yield is **an unusual situation in which issuers of debt are paid to borrow**.
- In other words, the depositors, or buyers of bonds, are effectively paying the bond issuer a net amount at maturity instead of earning a return through interest income.
- Negative-yielding bonds are purchased as safe-haven assets in times of turmoil and by pension and hedge fund managers for asset allocation.

Why the investors are buying these bonds?

Negative-yield bonds **attract investments during times of stress and uncertainty** as investors look to protect their capital from significant erosion.

Investors that are interested in buying negative-yielding bonds include central banks, insurance companies, and pension funds, as well as retail investors.

However, there are **various distinct reasons for the purchase of negative-yielding bonds**.

Asset Allocation

- Asset allocation means that the investments within the **fund must have a portion allocated to bonds to help create a diverse portfolio.**
- Allocating a portion of a portfolio to bonds is **designed to reduce or hedge the risk of loss from other investments**, such as equities. As a result, these funds must own bonds, even if the financial return is negative.

Pledged Assets

- Bonds are often used to **pledge as collateral for financing and as a result**, need to be held regardless of their price or yield.

Currency Gain

- Some investors believe they **can still make money even with negative yields.**
- The investor would have a gain or loss merely from the currency exchange fluctuation, irrespective of the yield and price of the bond investment.

Deflation Risk

- Domestically, investors might expect a period of deflation, or lower prices in the economy, which would allow them to make money by using their savings to buy more goods and services.

Safe Haven Assets

- Investors might also be interested in negative bond yields if the loss is less than it would be with another investment.
- In times of economic uncertainty, many investors rush to buy bonds because they're considered safe-haven investments. These purchases are called the **flight-to-safety-trade in the bond market.**
- During such a time, investors might accept a negative-yielding bond because the **negative yield might be far less of a loss than a potential double-digit percentage loss** in the equity markets.

Reason for demand

The fact that the **10-year and 15-year bonds are offering positive returns is a big attraction** at a time when interest rates in Europe have dropped significantly.

- As against minus -0.15% yield on the 5-year bond issued by China, the yields offered in safe European bonds are much lower, between -0.5% and -0.75% .
- While Europe, the US and other parts of the world are facing a second wave of Covid-19 cases, **China has demonstrated that it has controlled the spread of the pandemic** and is therefore **seen as a more stable region.**
- Many feel that **European investors are also looking to increase their exposure in China**, and hence there is a huge demand for these bonds.

The key factor driving this demand

It is the massive amount of liquidity injected by the global central banks after the pandemic began that has driven up prices of various assets including equities, debt and commodities.

- **Many investors could also be temporarily parking money** in negative-yielding government debt for **the purpose of hedging their risk portfolio in equities.**
- **In case the fresh wave of the Covid-19 pandemic leads to further lockdowns of economies,** then there could be further negative pressure on interest rates, pushing yields down further, and leading to profits even for investors who put in money at the current juncture.

Global central banks have injected an estimated more than \$10 trillion of liquidity through various instruments in the financial system — which is finding its way into various assets in the economy.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 28th NOVEMBER – 2020

A CLEAR READING OF THE AYURVEDA SURGERY MOVE

GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO HEALTH)

Last week, on November 20, a Gazette of India notification by the **Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)** identified **surgical procedures that can be performed by post-graduate Ayurvedic doctors in Shalya (surgery)** has stirred up a hornet's nest.

- **CCIM** is a statutory body under the **Indian Medicine Central Council Act.**
- It **regulates the Indian Medical systems of Ayurveda, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Unani Medicine.**

Background

In 2014, while speaking at the inauguration of a hospital in Mumbai, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extolled the virtues of India's medical heritage.

- He mentioned the Mythical surgical skills of Shiva who grafted an elephant head on Ganesha after having beheaded the boy.
- He further said, **"We know about Sushruta and his surgical dexterity at a time when the world had not yet woken up to the art and the science of surgery."**
- There are detailed descriptions in the **Sushruta Samhita, the ancient Sanskrit text on medicine and surgery,** of procedures such as rhinoplasty where the nose is reconstructed with tissue from the cheek.
- It was thousands of years later that modern plastic surgeons described this procedure.

Response to notification

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

The **Indian Medical Association (IMA)** has written a curious self-flagellating letter to the **Prime Minister**. Allopathic surgeon colleagues are outraged.

Social media and WhatsApp groups are abuzz with alarmist responses. Some have portrayed doomsday scenarios, 'where our children will be operated' by half-baked 'Ayurvedic doctors' in the future.

After 1947, the state's course of action

After Independence, the Indian state was faced with the **difficult task of accommodating both the ascendant modern medicine brought in by the British and India's traditional systems of medicine**, notably Ayurveda.

One idea was to take the best from all systems and integrate them into one cohesive science. This was possible but not easy as the systems have certain incompatible differences of approach.

- Faced with this vexing question, the state attempted everything. It patronised and encouraged formal medical education in modern medicine as well as in other traditional systems.
- **For a brief period there actually existed 'integrated' courses**, wherein both Ayurveda and Modern medicine were taught to students.
- But these withered away partly **due to opposition from purists in Ayurveda** who were outraged by the 'dilution' of their science.

Handling an identity crisis

As modern medicine made rapid strides, **Ayurvedic graduates experienced an identity crisis**. Many of them had joined the course not for the love of Ayurveda but to get a degree with the honorific 'Dr.' which gave them upward mobility, social status and even value in the marriage market.

- They **could not but practise allopathy which most of them do**. And became an important cog in the modern medicine machine.
- Thus, they became resident doctors, intensive care duty doctors and operation theatre assistant surgeons.
- They **picked up skills, were diligent and unlike their counterparts in MBBS**, were not constantly distracted by thoughts of post graduation and entrance exams.

Idea of Ayurvedic surgeons

- In an effort to develop postgraduate programmes, **Ayurveda medical colleges developed one in "Shalya" or "surgery"**. But, unlike the vast pharmacopeia, there is really nothing called Ayurvedic surgery.
- Most Ayurvedic medical colleges run hospitals. In some areas, theirs is the only viable and equipped hospital.

Procedures and complexities

The controversial notification, issued on November 20 — called the Indian Medicine Central Council (**Post Graduate Ayurveda Education**) **Amendment Regulations, 2020** — by the Central Council of Indian Medicine authorises.

- It laid down that an **MS (Ayurved) Shalya Tantra**, or General Surgery postgraduate degree holder on completion of his course **to perform 58 surgical procedures**.
- Some of the procedures in the list are rather complicated.

A silver lining

Ayurveda graduates including surgeons are **a large workforce in search of an identity**. India needs them.

- **If they are creatively and properly trained, they can play important roles in our health-care system.**
- On site or **ambulance care of trauma victims is in a shambles** in India. It is effectively delivered by trained paramedics in many countries.
- Given the right training, pay and identity, Ayurvedic surgeons can be trained to strengthen this service and save hundreds of lives.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 30th NOVEMBER – 2020

SPACE EXPLORATION IN THE ERA OF PRIVATISATION

GENERAL STUDIES - III (AWARENESS IN THE FIELDS OF SPACE)

Perhaps the **most stunning instance of a collaboration between public enterprises and the private sector in recent times is that between NASA and SpaceX.**

- It is stunning because of the sheer extent of the frontier it is trying to breach. With its **reusable rockets, large capsules to carry payloads and crew and competitive pricing**, SpaceX has revolutionised the space sector.
- The latest instances of this include the launch of the **Crew Dragon spacecraft on November 15**, which carried to the International Space Station four astronauts of NASA and One of the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).
- Another recent feat is the launch on November 24 of **60 more Starlink Internet relay satellites** into the orbit.
- These, and thousands more like these, are designed for the purpose of providing broadband services to people anywhere on Earth.

What is the picture in India?

In India too, we have seen the yielding of governmental control over the space industry bit by bit, starting from hiring of vendors and active outsourcing of rocket components to the present idea of allowing external agencies to use ISRO facilities.

- There has also been a **shift from a mandated focus on utilitarian projects to those focused on exploring space and our planetary neighbours**, the Moon, the Sun and so on.
- It is not too much to expect that soon, India may also see the emergence of collaborations like that between SpaceX and NASA.

What does the commercialisation of the space sector mean in practical terms?

A former director of ISRO Satellite Centre, noted that the collaboration between NASA and SpaceX has in fact taken the **American space programme to a level that had not been possible for NASA to achieve by itself.**

Having their own rockets to transport astronauts to the International Space Station and back has prevented Americans from spending hugely on the mission, as they were doing earlier. **This was possible only because of NASA's active collaboration with SpaceX.**

Thus, the **opening up of the space sector** could have many more such advancements in store.

- With the November 24 launch of **60 Starlink satellites, the total number of such satellites sent up by the company equals 955.**
- Thousands more will join these, and the **aim of this exercise is to provide Internet services that link any point on Earth to any other point.**
- Targeting coverage in northern U.S. and Canada this year, **the aim is to have the globe covered by 2021.**
- This will be the new telecom revolution then, in the context of India, reaching out to rural areas as never before.

Would curiosity-driven science survive in the era of privatisation?

The **cargo version of Dragon-2 spacecraft is the upgraded version of Dragon.** It is a **reusable spacecraft capable of returning significant cargo** to the Earth from the International Space Station.

At least in the case of its launch, planned for December 5, **it seems that curiosity-driven science would not only survive, but would rather be enhanced.**

- This spacecraft is not just carrying payloads for scientific experiments, but is also **sporting a new commercially owned and operated 'airlock'.**
- **An airlock is like a doorway, that will allow larger payloads to move in and out of the spacecraft,** considerably expanding the scope of experiment design and structure.
- This mission also **carries interesting experiments**, one of which is a mixture of meteorite samples and microbes, aimed at seeing how the microbes can be used for biomining on asteroids.

- Another experiment **aims at studying how changes in gravity can affect cardiovascular tissue.**
- So, while there is room for curiosity-driven science, there is also the aspect of utility in the event of more humans travelling to space.

What is the future of space tourism?

Space tourism could become more common as space travel becomes less expensive.

- There are companies now, such as **Virgin Galactic, Blue Origin and SpaceX**, that will offer space flights, albeit for a very high fee.
- Perhaps **this is the stepping-stone to a future colony on the Moon**, and should it come through, we will not be without Internet connections there.

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