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# **EDITORIALS**

## **In - Depth**

**FEBRUARY - 2020**

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# CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

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### FEARS OF AN IMPENDING COUP IN MYANMAR

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

Fears of a military coup are roiling Myanmar (Burma) three days **ahead of the scheduled opening of its newly elected Lower House of Parliament.**

#### **The reason:**

The military says the **November 2020 general election was full of “irregularities”**, and has maintained that the results are therefore not valid.

- It is **questioning the authenticity of some 9 million votes cast in the election.**
- The **National League for Democracy (NLD)**, led by **Aung San Suu Kyi**, won a landslide victory in the election.
- **The military has demanded** that the **United Elections Commission (UEC)** of Myanmar which oversees elections, or the government, or outgoing parliamentarians prove at a special session before the new parliament convenes on February 1, that the elections were free and fair.



## **The military's Constitution:**

It was the military that drafted the **2008 Constitution**, and put it to a questionable referendum in April that year.

- The **Constitution was the military's "roadmap to democracy"**, which it had been forced to adopt under increasing pressure from the west.
- It was also due to its own realisation that opening up Myanmar to the outside world was now no longer an option but a dire economic necessity.
- But the **military made sure to safeguard in the Constitution its own role and supremacy** in national affairs.
- Under its provisions, the **military reserves for itself 25 per cent of seats in both Houses of Parliament**, to which it appoints serving military officials.
- Also, a political party which is a proxy for the military contests elections.

## **The army's allegation:**

A military spokesman said earlier in the week that the **Tatmadaw** (Official name of the armed forces of Myanmar) had found 8.6 million irregularities in 314 areas across all states and regions.

This indicated the possibility that people had voted "more than once", or had engaged in some other "voting malpractice".

While, The United Elections Commission (UEC) has denied these allegations.

## **Fears of a coup:**

The speech and the army's assertion has prompted the **United States embassy and diplomatic missions of 15 other countries and the European Union in Yangon** to issue a joint statement "oppos[ing] any attempt to alter the outcome of the elections or impede Myanmar's democratic transition".

- Myanmar's **democratic transition is a work in progress**.
- The results of the 2020 election, held during the pandemic, **are being seen by the NLD as a mandate for its plan of constitutional reform**, through which it aims to do away with the military's role in politics and governance.
- This will not be easy given the tight constitutional restrictions for amendments.
- The world will be watching the military to see if it sends its representatives for the Assembly on Monday.

## **Joint statement by diplomatic missions**

**A statement is jointly issued by the diplomatic missions** of Australia; Canada; the Delegation of the EU and European Union Member States with presence in Myanmar: Denmark, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden; as well as Switzerland; the United Kingdom; the United States; Norway; and New Zealand.

### WHAT DOES 'GREEN TAX' MEAN FOR VEHICLE OWNERS?

#### GENERAL STUDIES - III (ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION)

Union Transport Minister has announced his Ministry's approval of a 'green tax' on vehicles of specified vintage, as a means of dissuading people from using polluting vehicles.

Among the major features of the measure are:

- **Transport vehicles older than 8 years** could be charged Green Tax at the time of renewal of fitness certificate, **at the rate of 10 to 25 % of road tax;**
- **Personal vehicles** to be charged Green Tax at the time of **renewal of Registration Certification after 15 years;**
- **Public transport vehicles**, such as city buses, **to be charged lower Green tax;**
- **Higher Green tax (50% of Road Tax)** for vehicles being registered in highly polluted cities.
- **Differential tax**, depending on fuel (petrol/diesel) and type of vehicle;

#### **Exemption:**

- Vehicles like strong **hybrids, electric vehicles and alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol, LPG** to be exempted;
- **Vehicles used in farming**, such as tractor, harvester, tiller etc to be exempted;

#### **Why this Tax has been implementing?**

It is estimated that **commercial vehicles**, which constitute about 5% of the total vehicle fleet, **contribute about 65-70% of total vehicular pollution.**

- The **older fleet, typically manufactured before the year 2000** constitute less than 1 % of the total fleet but contributes around **15% of total vehicular pollution.**
- These **older vehicles pollute 10-25 times more** than modern vehicles.

#### **Does scrapping old vehicles carry big benefits?**

India has been working on a scrappage policy for years that could, on the one hand, give a boost to the automobile industry and related businesses by stimulating demand, and lead to recovery of steel, aluminium, plastic and so on for recycling, on the other.

#### **The benefits of the "Green Tax" could be:**

- To dissuade people from using vehicles which damage the environment.
- To motivate people to switch to newer, less polluting vehicles.
- Green tax will reduce the pollution level, and make the polluter pay for pollution.

The benefits from vehicle replacements can be gauged from Transport Ministry data: **commercial vehicles making up 5% of the vehicle fleet but contribute an estimated 65-70% of total vehicular pollution.**

## Is the proposed policy for scrappage workable?

In 2015, the Transport Ministry said the idea was to give a certificate to owners selling off old vehicles of specified age, which could be redeemed for a discount of ₹30,000 to ₹50,000 for new passenger vehicles.

- For a commercial vehicle, the benefits including taxes would be an estimated ₹1.5 lakh.
- **This idea did not progress**, however, and among those who expressed reservations on high costs was NITI Aayog. The Aayog was concerned that some sections may not be in a position to retire old vehicles because of the high capital cost.
- **The present initiative**, however, has the limited objective of nudging the owners of older vehicles to sell them off rather than pay a green tax penalty.
- Continued operation of the vehicles would **defeat the clean air objective and bring no cheer to the automobile industry**.

## What are the options available to tweak the policy?

For a clean-up, **commercial transport vehicles are of highest concern**: on fuel efficiency, emissions and safety.

- The Centre could offer a green new deal with financial options such as loans and grants to smaller operators to scrap their junk vehicles, while escalating the green tax annually to achieve the nudge effect.
- A second stimulus to bus companies could help green the fleet and cut pollution.
- Small operators such as autorickshaws could be offered low-interest loans, particularly to move to electric vehicles.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 3<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### AUNG SAN SUU KYI: RISE AND FALL

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

**Myanmar's military coup recalls events from 1990.** Then youth leader **Aung San Suu Kyi went on to rise to political power**, but because of the Rohingya crisis, she may not enjoy the same global support this time.

#### Key events after the coupe:

- A day after seizing power in a coup, the **Myanmar military appeared to be settling into its old familiar role as a junta**.
- The Commander in Chief of the **Tatmadaw (the Myanmar military)**, General Min Aung Hliang, has appointed himself the head of government.
- There **have been no open protests by people or political parties** against the coup yet.
- **Aung San Suu Kyi's whereabouts are not known**, although it is believed she is under house arrest.

## Total recall about Aung San Suu Kyi:

### Previous years:

For Suu Kyi, the **wheel has turned full circle from 1990.**

- That year, as the **young founder of the National League for Democracy**, she claimed the legacy of her father General Aung, **known as the founding father of modern Burma**, and swept the elections the junta had agreed to hold as a way of defusing the protests.
- **The junta**, which called itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council at the time, **nullified the election results as it has done now, and jailed Suu Kyi.**
- She **would spend the better part of the next two decades in detention**, mostly house imprisonment.
- The **international community, led by the West**, was unstinted in its support for her, constantly exerting pressure on the junta for her release, and imposing sanctions on Myanmar.
- But the insular Myanmar military defied these pressures well into the first decade of the 21st century.
- It began opening up gradually only **after Cyclone Nargis devastated most of the country**, when the military's handling of relief led to discontent within Myanmar.

### After her release:

**After her release in 2010, Suu Kyi**, who had declared a boycott of the elections held the same year, decided to participate in by-elections in 2012, **thus legitimising the 2008 Constitution the military had imposed on the country.**

- **The 2015 elections were a sweep for the NLD**, just like the 2020 elections five years later.
- Though its proxy, the **Union Solidarity and Development Party**, fared even worse than it had in 2015, the **military has 25% of the seats reserved for its nominees** from ranks of serving military officials.
- Underneath its allegations of "irregularities" in the 2020 election, **it appears that the Tatmadaw felt threatened by Suu Kyi's undiminished**, even increasing popularity despite five years of incumbency.
- Also, despite the **iron-clad clauses in the Constitution protecting the military's role**, the generals seemed to have sensed that Suu Kyi would use her fresh mandate to restore civilian supremacy in national affairs.
- **One provision in the Constitution ensured Suu Kyi could not become the President**, as the office was barred to anyone married to a foreign national.
- Suu Kyi's **late husband was British, as are her two sons.**

### Fall from grace:

**Suu Kyi is no longer the global icon she was through the 1990s.**

- Her tacit **anti-Rohingya stance** may have earned her popularity among the majority Barmars in Myanmar, but she has lost many allies in the West.
- There were **even calls for revoking her Nobel Peace Prize.**
- So while history has repeated itself, this time around there may be none of the ardour that Western governments showed as they campaigned for her release through the 1990s and 2000s.
- **The US has threatened sanctions** but this may no longer be seen as the best way forward, as they tend to hurt ordinary people more than they do the leaders they are aimed at.

- **For the people of Myanmar**, sanctions would mean a return to the dark days of the 1990s, when the military made money and the others struggled with shortages and poverty.

## India & Myanmar:

After joining the campaign for Suu Kyi's release in the 1990s, **New Delhi recalibrated its position to begin a full engagement with the junta** although this upset Myanmar's pro-democracy movement and the NLD in particular.

- In return, the **Myanmar military cracked down on the ULFA and other militant groups of India's Northeast in safe havens in Myanmar.**
- Senior generals visited India regularly, stopping in Bodh Gaya on the way to or back from Delhi.
- **Since 2015, India's supportive stand on the Army crackdown on Rohingya** has ensured the friendship continued, although Suu Kyi herself did not particularly warm to the NDA government.
- **India is unlikely to draw back from its engagement with the military**, although it has expressed concern at the sudden developments in Myanmar.
- The **competition with China** for influence in the region extends to Myanmar, vital to India's strategic and economic interests from West Bengal and the Northeast to Southeast Asia.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 4<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

# NO TO VACCINE NATIONALISM, YES TO GLOBAL COOPERATION

## GENERAL STUDIES - IV (ETHICAL ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

Since the **worldwide inoculation process** is going strong, **vaccine diplomacy** has become a hot topic.

While the leading and advanced countries have been mindlessly selfish in amassing approved vaccines, it is the Global South countries, India and China, which have provided a ray of hope to most countries.

### What is vaccine nationalism?

Countries such as the USA and UK have pre-booked more coronavirus vaccines than their populations need. This could end up putting vaccines out of reach for countries that need them.

Other countries, including India and Russia, have taken similar stances. **This prioritisation of domestic markets has become known as vaccine nationalism.**



## Advance purchase contracts

**The United States** has entered into multi-billion-dollar agreements with at least six big pharmaceutical companies for assured supplies of a combined 800 million doses of vaccines that they are separately developing for novel coronavirus.

- That is more than two doses for every American citizen.
- The agreements mean that if any of these companies are successful in developing a vaccine, they would be obligated to provide the agreed supplies to the United States before anyone else.

**The United Kingdom** has entered into similar agreements with multiple companies to secure about 340 million doses, or about five doses per capita.

- Similar arrangements have been reached by **European Union**, and some other countries like Mexico, as well.

## India's role in worldwide inoculation process:

While **advanced countries have turned their back** on the need of poor countries to access COVID-19 vaccines, **India has displayed empathy to their needs.**

- India has taken a position that a significant percentage of the approved doses will be permitted for exports.
- While **its exports to neighbouring countries** will be **under grant mode**, initial shipment of vaccines to least developed countries will be free of cost.
- **Shipments of vaccines from India** have already started reaching different parts of the developing world.
- **Brazil has received 2 million doses of vaccine** from India (as of January 23).
- While India is in its first phase of vaccination to cover health-care workers, **exports from India are helping other countries** also in initiating phase one of their vaccination programme — a gesture well-appreciated globally.
- In a democracy, **one can expect the backlash of sending vaccines abroad without vaccinating its population.**

## Keep track of SDGs:

**The attitude of India towards vaccinating the populations in the poorer countries** has generated discussion in the richer countries about the necessity for more proactive measures to roll out vaccines to the developing nations.

- The **reversal of progress on many Sustainable Development Goals**, or SDGs, such as **SDG 3** ("**Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**") could affect the health of the world population, and global growth itself.
- Even before COVID-19, projections have shown that 6% of the global population would be in extreme poverty, thereby causing enormous challenges to **SDG 1** ("**End poverty in all its forms everywhere**").

# CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- According to **estimates by the International Monetary Fund**, over 50% of emerging markets and developing economies that were converging toward advanced economies per capita income over the last decade are expected to diverge over the 2020-22 period.

## COVAX project as a pathway

The **COVAX project** is a **global risk-sharing mechanism** for pooled procurement and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

- It is an ambitious programme based on **funding from high and middle-income countries**.
- Although the funding was not enough for the project, **U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to join the project has now raised expectations significantly**.
- COVAX is a **unique case of global cooperation and a strategic shift** to enhance global development outcomes.
- Furthermore, since most of the vaccines are purchased from the global south for developing nations, the COVAX project can draw new pathways for global development.

## Way forward:

The lower price of the vaccines is what has attracted many commercial buyers globally, including emerging economies such Brazil and South Africa.

- The **ability to produce large volumes of vaccine at an affordable cost underlines India's importance** to developing countries when it comes to drug access.
- The development of vaccines is a classic story of global cooperation between the North and the South.
- Unfortunately, the increasing nationalist tendencies of the democratic World during the pandemic have challenged the positive narrative on global cooperation.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 5<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### SUB-CATEGORISATION OF OBCS

#### GENERAL STUDIES – I (SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY, DIVERSITY OF INDIA)

In September last year, a **Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court reopened the legal debate on sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for reservations**.

Recently, the Centre has extended the tenure of The Commission to Examine Sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) **headed by Justice G Rohini**, former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court. The commission now has until July 31 to submit its report.

#### What is sub-categorisation of OBCs?

OBCs are granted 27% reservation in jobs and education under the central government.

The debate arises out of the perception that only a **few affluent communities among the over 2,600 included in the Central List of OBCs** have secured a major part of this 27% reservation.

- **The argument for sub-categorisation** — or creating categories within OBCs for reservation — is that it would ensure **“equitable distribution” of representation among all OBC communities**.
- To examine this issue, the Rohini Commission was constituted on October 2, 2017.
- Before the Rohini Commission was set up, the Centre had granted **constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)**.

### **Commission’s terms of reference:**

It was originally set up with three terms of reference:

1. **To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits** of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
2. **To work out the mechanism**, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such OBCs;
3. **To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes** or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

A **fourth term of reference was added on January 22, 2020**, when the Cabinet granted it an extension:

4. **To study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs** and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

### **Challenges before the commission:**

A hurdle for the Commission has been the **absence of data for the population of various communities** to compare with their representation in jobs and admissions.

- The Commission wrote to Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, requesting for an **appropriate Budget provision for a proposed all-India survey** for an estimate of the caste-wise population of OBCs.
- But on March 7, 2019 **(three days before the Lok Sabha poll schedule was announced)**, Justice Rohini wrote to Gehlot: **“We have now decided not to undertake such survey at this stage.”**
- On August 31, 2018, then **Home Minister Rajnath Singh had announced that in Census 2021, data of OBCs will also be collected**, but since then the **government has been silent on this**.
- Whereas groups of OBCs have been demanding enumeration of OBCs in the Census.

## Findings so far:

In 2018, the Commission analysed the data of 1.3 lakh central jobs given under OBC quota over the preceding five years and OBC admissions to central higher education institutions, including universities, IITs, NITs, IIMs and AIIMS, over the preceding three years.

## The findings were:

1. **97% of all jobs and educational seats** have gone to just **25% of all sub-castes** classified as OBCs;
2. **95% of these jobs and seats** have gone to just **10 OBC communities**;
3. **983 OBC communities** — 37% of the total — **have zero representation in jobs and educational institutions**;
4. **994 OBC sub-castes** have a total representation of **only 2.68% in recruitment and admissions**.

## The extent of OBC recruitment in central jobs:

As per the report submitted to the NCBC by the Department of Personnel and Training on July 24, 2020, OBC representation is:

- **51 %** in group-A central government services,
- **38 %** in group-B,
- **25 %** in group-C (excluding safai karmacharis) and
- **72 %** in group-C (safai karmacharis).

This data was for only 42 ministries/departments of the central government.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 6<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### THE PROTESTS OVER AN ECO-SENSITIVE ZONE IN NARMADA DISTRICT

#### GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION)

Tribal communities have been protesting since the beginning of November, **when the district administration served the first notice to execute the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) order.**

**Tribals, especially from the Tadvī and Vasava communities,** have been on the edge ever since Kevadia village in Nandod taluka of Narmada district, **was developed into a tourism circuit around the Statue of Unity.**

## Why are tribal communities protesting against the notification?

1. As per the provisions of the notification, **land falling in the eco-sensitive zone cannot be transferred for non-agricultural use for commercial, industrial or residential purposes.**
2. A process has been initiated **to include the state government as the co-owner of the land in the 121 villages.**
3. The notification, combined with the Statue of Unity Tourism Authority (SoUTA), by the Gujarat government to govern Kevadia, which now has **increased administrative needs owing to the booming tourism, has left tribals in a state of mistrust and fear.**

The **tribal communities** feel the simultaneous implementation of the two government decisions could dilute the “**power**” **vested with villagers under the Panchayat (Extension of Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**, implemented in areas notified under Schedule V of the Constitution.

## Why are political leaders joining the protests?

The governments are unwilling **to implement the Schedule V and PESA in its entirety.**

- Tribals are indigenous and cannot be shifted and shunted out of their homes the way they have been so far.
- The governments, **in the name of development, have been grabbing lands of tribals and selling them off to multimillionaires.**
- The fight is against **this planned elimination of the tribal identity.**
- PESA empowers the tribes, but that power has not been handed over to the gram sabhas.

## What is PESA?

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA is a law enacted by the Government of India **for ensuring self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas** for people living in the **Scheduled Areas of India.**

- **Gujarat notified the State PESA Rules in January 2017**, applicable in 4,503 gram sabhas under 2,584 village panchayats in 50 tribal talukas in eight districts of the state.
- The PESA Act is rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of the tribal community and vests ultimate power to the gram sabha to make administrative decisions.

## What is SoUTA?

The government passed the **Statue of Unity Area Development and Tourism Governance Authority or the SoU Tourism Authority (SoUTA) Bill** last year.

- The SoUTA has **powers ranging from acquiring land for any development project to taking punitive action against those violating/encroaching it.**
- **The authority will define the limits** of the tourism development area and will be **empowered to acquire immovable property** under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.
- It will largely work as a local body that will prepare and execute a development plan or a town planning scheme.

## The Gujarat government's position

The Gujarat government has decided to go ahead with its plan to formalise the creation of the new authority for the SoU, which has been aggressively marketed as a tourism destination.

On December 23, the state government announced details of SoUTA.

- **The first circle** will include administrators for the Statue of Unity, Shreshth Bharat Bhavan, Gora bridge navigation channel, Jetty service and overall maintenance of the complex.
- **The second circle** will include the administrators for all other projects around SoU.
- Each of the two circles will have 112 employees including two supervisory engineers, an executive engineer (civil) and executive engineer (electrical).

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 8<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

# UTTARAKHAND DISASTER: A GLACIAL LAKE BURST OR AVALANCHE

## GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION)

A GLACIAL lake burst, a cloud burst or an avalanche, the impact of climate change or “development” — **scientists are not sure what triggered the sudden surge of water near Chamoli in Uttarakhand** that briefly raised fears of a repeat of the 2013 disaster in the state.

- The scenario being most talked about was what glaciologists like to call a **glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF)**.
- It is a reference to **flooding caused downstream due to a breach in a glacial lake**.

### Glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF):

**Retreating glaciers**, like several in the Himalayas, usually **result in the formation of lakes at their tips, called proglacial lakes**, often bound only by sediments and boulders.

- If the boundaries of these lakes are breached, **it can lead to large amounts of water rushing down to nearby streams and rivers**, gathering momentum on the way by picking up sediments, rocks and other material, and resulting in flooding downstream.
- **GLOF events are not unusual**, but their **impact depends on the size of the proglacial lake** that burst, and location.

### Glacial lake burst or avalanche?

- But while **GLOF is being considered to be the most likely trigger** for recent event, there are questions surrounding this possibility. “We don’t know of any big glacial lakes in this region.

- An **avalanche is quite common**, and there could have been one, but an avalanche on its own would not result in an increase in the flow of water in the river.

## What is the avalanche?

An avalanche, **also called a snowslide**, is an event that occurs when a cohesive slab of snow lying upon a weaker layer of snow fractures and slides down a steep slope.

- Avalanches are typically **triggered in a starting zone from a mechanical failure in the snowpack** (slab avalanche) when the forces of the snow exceed its strength but sometimes only with gradual widening (loose snow avalanche).
- **Falling masses of snow and ice**, avalanches pose a threat to anyone on snowy mountainsides. Beautiful to witness from afar, they can be deadly because of their intensity and seeming unpredictability.

## What is the Cloudburst?

Cloudburst is a **sudden, very heavy rainfall, usually local in nature and of brief duration**. Most so-called cloudbursts occur **in connection with thunderstorms**.

- A large amount of water may thus accumulate at high levels, and if the upward currents are weakened the whole of this water falls at one time.
- **Cloudbursts are especially common in mountainous areas**.
- This is probably because the **warm air currents of a thunderstorm tend to follow the upward slope of a mountain**.

## The recent collapse in Uttarakhand:

The **Himalayan rivers pass through environmentally fragile areas**. However, like other Himalayan rivers, the Dhauliganga too has been dammed.

The **recent collapse of the glacier** led to rippling flash floods in the Dhauliganga and the Rishiganga and also impacted the Alaknanda.

- A portion of the **Nanda Devi glacier broke off in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district** on February 7.
- It triggered an avalanche and a deluge in the Alaknanda river system that washed away hydroelectric stations and trapped more than 100 labourers who are feared dead.
- The sudden flood in the middle of the day in **the Dhuli Ganga, Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers** — all intricately linked tributaries of the Ganga — triggered widespread panic and large-scale devastation in the high mountain areas.
- Two power projects — **NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project** and the **Rishi Ganga Hydel Project** — were extensively damaged.

## When the hills shake Major natural disasters in the region over the past three decades:



**Nature's fury:** Part of a glacier broke off in Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, causing a massive flood in the Dhauliganga river. ❦

**1991: Uttarkashi earthquake** – An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit the undivided state of Uttar Pradesh in October 1991. At least 768 people were killed and thousands of homes destroyed

**1998: Malpa landslide** – The small village of Malpa was wiped out in a landslide in which nearly 255 people, including 55 Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims, were killed. The resulting debris partially blocked Sharda river

**1999: Chamoli earthquake** – An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit Chamoli district killing over 100 people. The adjoining Rudraprayag district was also heavily affected. Several ground deformations were reported as a result of the earthquake, and landslips and changes in water flow were recorded. Cracks were observed on roads and on the ground

**2013: North India floods** – In June 2013, a multi-day cloudburst in Uttarakhand caused devastating floods and landslips. According to the State government, more than 5,700 people were presumed dead in the disaster. As bridges and roads were destroyed, more than 3 lakh people were trapped in the Valleys leading to the Char Dham pilgrimage sites

### The major river confluence in Uttarakhand:

- The Dhauliganga, originating from Vasudhara Tal, flows in a meandering course, which takes it through the Nanda Devi National Park.
- Dhauliganga joined the Alaknanda at Vishnuprayag near Joshimath.
- Alaknanda meets the Mandakini river, coming from the north at Rudraprayag.
- After subsuming Mandakini, the Alaknanda join the Ganga at Devprayag near Kedarnath.
- Alaknanda then disappears and the mighty Ganga carries on its journey.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 9<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### NFHS DATA AND CONCERN OF THE LATEST ROUND FINDINGS

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO HEALTH)

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) recently released the results from the first phase of the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)**.

This is **the fifth such survey and the first phase** — for which data was collected in the second half of 2019 — covered 17 states and five Union Territories.

#### What is NFHS?

National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a **large-scale nationwide survey of representative households**. The data is collected over multiple rounds.



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- The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** has designated **International Institute for Population Sciences** in Mumbai as the nodal agency.
- **The survey is a collaborative effort of IIPS; ORC Macro, Maryland (US); and the East-West Center, Hawaii (US).**
- The survey is **funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** with supplementary support from UNICEF.
- This is the **fifth NFHS** and refers to the 2019-20 period.
- **The first four referred to 1992-93, 1998-99, 2005-06 and 2015-16, respectively.**

## What data does it collect?

The initial factsheet for **NFHS-5 provides state-wise data on 131 parameters.**

**These parameters include questions such** as how many households get drinking water, electricity and improved sanitation; what is sex ratio at birth, what are infant and child mortality metrics, what is the status of maternal and child health, how many have high blood sugar or high blood pressure etc.

**In the fifth iteration, there are new questions** on preschool education, disability, access to a toilet facility, death registration, bathing practices during menstruation, and methods and reasons for abortion are added.

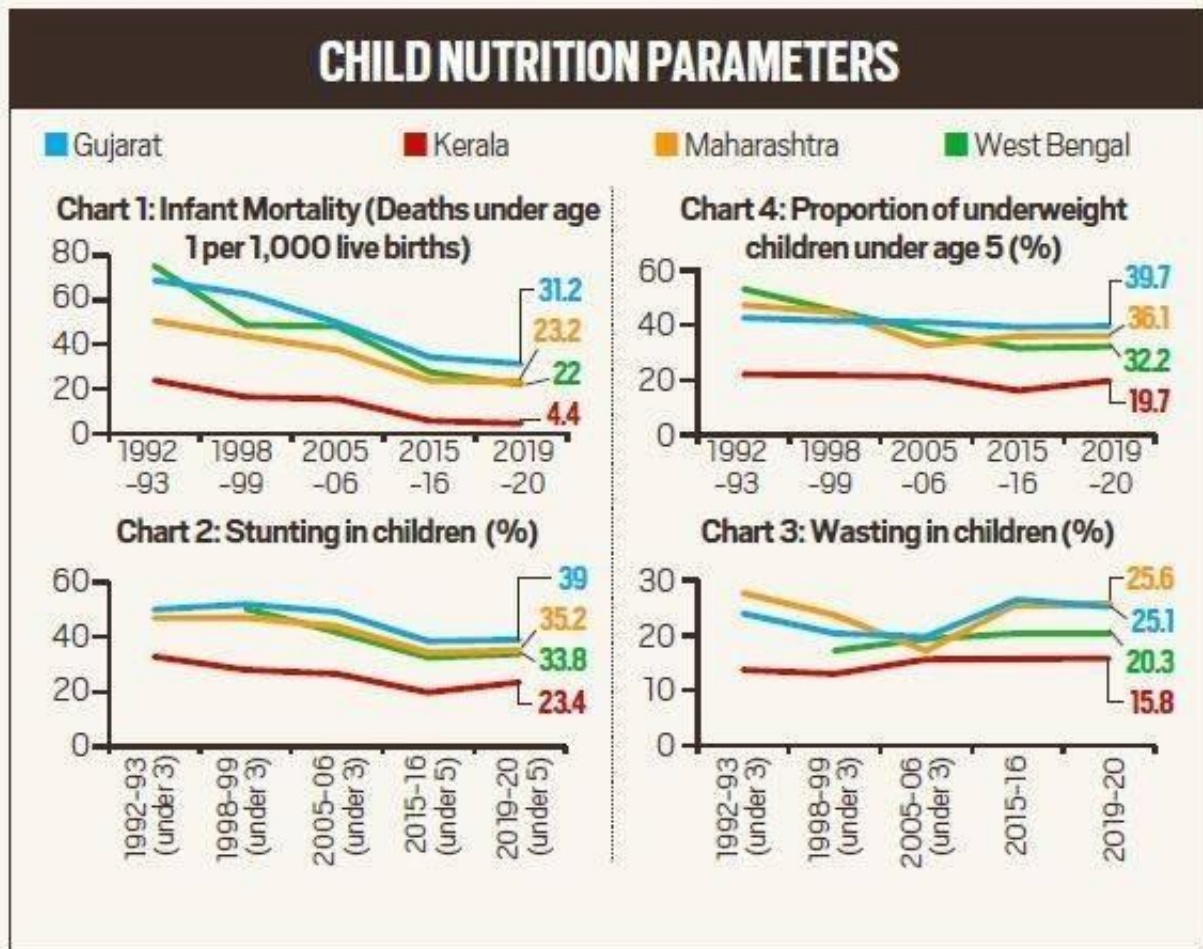
## Why are NFHS results important?

The NFHS database is possibly the most important one **because it not only feeds into the research needs and informs advocacy but also is central to both central and state-level policymaking.**

## What has NFHS-5 found?

Researchers and experts on health and welfare metrics have described the latest **results as “shocking”, “alarming” and “very troublesome”.**

- On several parameters, **the number of states worsening over the last round** — NFHS-4 (2015-16) — is not only high but often more than the number of states improving.
- The most troubling is that on child malnutrition parameters **several states have either been stagnant or worsened.**
- In other words, children born between 2014 and 2019 (that is, 0 to 5 years of age) are more malnourished than the previous generation.
- **Another cause of concern** is the fact that the first phase data is pre-pandemic and it is quite likely that the second phase — which will also incorporate Covid’s impact — may throw up ever poorer results.



### Concerns

- **Worsening child malnutrition**, as well as **rising levels of anaemia in women** (especially pregnant ones), points to Indian children born in the past 5 years likely suffering from both cognitive and physical deficiencies.
- In January 2012, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that high child malnutrition level in India was **“a national shame”**.
- The latest results show that health-wise, **India has taken a turn for the worse since 2015 despite improvements in water availability and sanitation methods.**

### Significance of these results

Health outcomes such as **child malnutrition data are the result of a complex set of reasons** — ranging from the state of a family’s income generation to environmental factors to government interventions.

Experts say that only **when the full set of raw unit-level data is available can a proper analysis of why India suffered such reversals over the past five years be done.**

### DAMS AND DAMAGES

#### GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)

Reni village in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district is the **birthplace of the iconic Chipko movement**.

- The way to Reni was dotted with **hydropower projects that were marred by controversy**.
- The villagers complained about the **rampant flouting of norms by the hydropower developers**, which forced them to protest against such projects.

#### **The Dams:**

On February 7, **two such hydropower projects located close to Reni suffered damages** from flash floods that left more than 30 dead and more than 175 people missing.

1. The barrages of the **2 MW Rishiganga hydropower project**, which is **located on the river Rishiganga**.
2. NTPC's **520 MW Tapovan-Vishnugad hydropower project**, on the **River Dhauliganga**.

It is important to note here though that dams are not victims of disasters; **they, in fact, exacerbate disasters**.

#### **Flouting all norms**

A June 26, **2019 order of the Uttarakhand High Court** questioned the use of explosives on the Rishiganga site — that too for **illegal mining in the name of dam construction**.

- **The use of explosives** has repeatedly been questioned for dam construction, and the construction of other infrastructure projects, such as roads, in the fragile Himalayan State.
- **Other than this, deforestation** takes place when dams are constructed.
- While **compensatory afforestation is the norm**, it is often flouted.
- The **construction material that is supposed to be dumped on separate land** is often dumped into the rivers.

#### **Chopra Committee report:**

**The Chopra Committee report of 2014** brings more clarity on how dams exacerbate a disaster such as floods.

- The committee was **formed in October 2013 after the Supreme Court ordered**.
- The Union Environment Ministry, constituted an expert body **to assess whether dams exacerbated the 2013 floods** in the State where over 4,000 people were killed, mainly in the Kedarnath Valley.

- The committee was **headed by environmentalist Ravi Chopra** and comprised 10 other members including geologists and biodiversity experts.

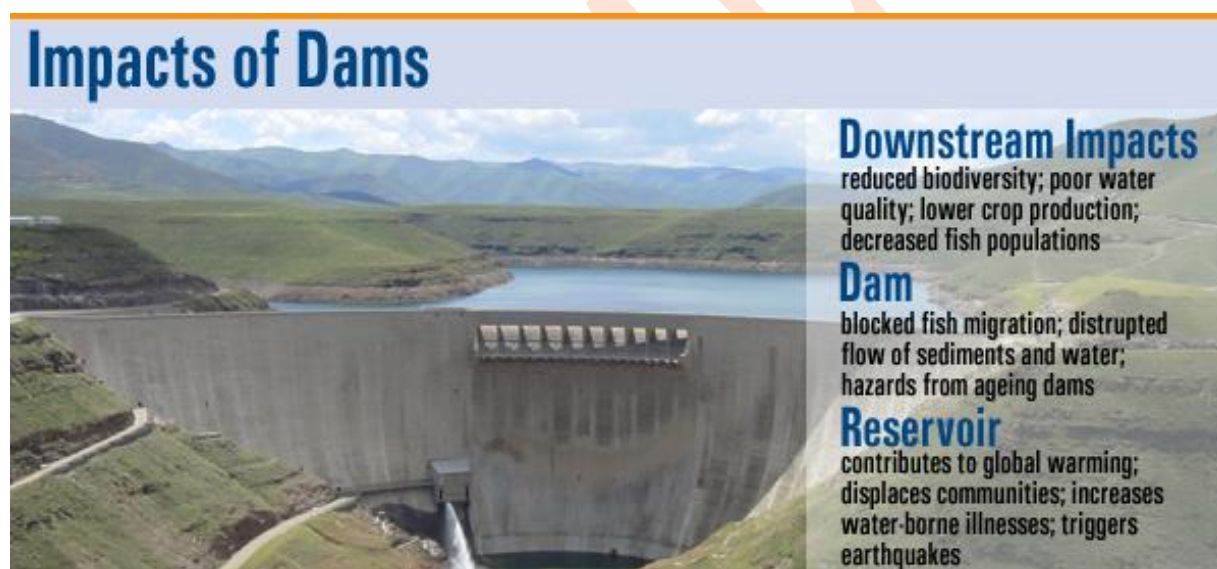
## **Dams exacerbate a disaster:**

Chopra Committee report mentions **how dams exacerbated the 2013 deluge**.

- It points out the riverbeds were already raised from the **disposed muck at the dam construction sites, and** could not contain the sudden increased flow from floodwaters.
- The report presents **evidence to prove that dams are not only damaged in floods, they also cause immense damage in downstream areas.**
- **This is because** as floodwaters damage a barrage, they increase the destructive capacity of the water that flows downstream of the barrage.

The Chopra Committee **suggested that 23 of the 24 proposed dam projects it reviewed be cancelled for the potential damage they could do.**

However, even after all these years, **the matter remains pending in the Supreme Court, and environmental norms for dam construction continue to be flouted** in Uttarakhand.



## **Impact of climate change**

**Himalayan glaciers are receding and disintegrating as a result of climate change,** and the snow cover in the Himalayas is also thinning.

- Research also shows how an increased number and volume of glacial lakes should be expected as a **direct impact of increased temperatures.**
- **For dams,** this means rapid increase or decrease in the reservoir water level.
- **It also means** that the projections on the life of a dam reservoir may not stand due to erratic events, such as floods, that could rapidly fill a reservoir with muck and boulders brought along with the floods.

## **Threat of earthquakes:**

There is also the threat of earthquakes.

- In terms of earthquake risk, **Uttarakhand lies in Seismic Zone-IV (severe intensity) and Seismic Zone-V (very severe intensity).**
- Ignoring this, many dams have been constructed in zones that are under high risk of witnessing severe earthquakes.

## **Concerns:**

Irrespective of the evidence, the **Uttarakhand government plans on continuing to build dams as a source of revenue.**

- The **State plans to construct up to 450 hydropower projects** of 27,039 MW installed capacity.
- Clearly, the **Uttarakhand government has chosen to ignore the disastrous impacts of rampant dam-building.**
- It is clear that dams worsen disasters, and for this to be ignored by the State authorities is unfortunate.

## **EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 11<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021**

# **THE LAWS GOVERNING THE CYBER WORLD IN INDIA**

## **GENERAL STUDIES - III (AWARENESS IN THE FIELDS OF IT)**

Recently, **The Centre has issued notice to Twitter** after the micro-blogging site restored more than 250 accounts that had been suspended earlier on the government's 'legal demand'.

- The **government wants the platform to comply with its earlier order** of January 31 by which it was asked to **block accounts and a controversial hashtag.**
- Twitter reinstated the accounts and tweets on its own and later refused to go back on the decision, contending that it found no violation of its policy.

## **Are platforms required to comply with government requests?**

**Cooperation between technology services companies and law enforcement agencies** is now deemed a vital part of fighting cybercrime, and various other crimes that are committed using computer resources.

These crimes cover **hacking, digital impersonation and theft of data.**

## **The potential of the Internet:**

The internet and **its offshoots** such as **mail and messaging services and social media networks** are capable of to disseminate potentially harmful content such as hate speech, rumours, inflammatory and provocative messages and child pornography.

- This has led to law enforcement officials constantly seeking to curb the ill-effects of using the medium.
- Therefore, **most nations have framed laws mandating cooperation** by Internet service providers or web hosting service providers and other intermediaries to cooperate with law and order authorities in certain circumstances.

## What does the law in India cover?

In India, the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, as amended from time to time, governs all activities related to the use of computer resources.

- **It covers all 'intermediaries'** who play a role in the use of computer resources and electronic records.
- **The term 'intermediaries' includes** providers of telecom service, network service, Internet service and web hosting, besides search engines, online payment and auction sites, online marketplaces and cyber cafes.
- **It also includes** any person who, on behalf of another, "receives, stores or transmits" any electronic record. Social media platforms would fall under this definition.

## What are the Centre's powers vis-à-vis intermediaries?

- **Section 69 of the Act** confers on the **Central and State governments the power to issue directions** "to intercept, monitor or decrypt...any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource".
- **The grounds on which these powers may be exercised are:** in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence relating to these, or for investigating any offence.

## How does the government block websites and networks?

**Section 69A**, for similar reasons and grounds on which it can intercept or monitor information, enables the Centre to ask any agency of the government, or any intermediary, to block access to the public of any information generated, transmitted, received or stored or hosted on any computer resource.

- Any such **request for blocking access must be based on reasons given in writing.**
- Procedures and safeguards have been incorporated in the rules framed for the purpose.

## What are the obligations of intermediaries under Indian law?

1. **Intermediaries are required to preserve and retain specified information** in a manner and format prescribed by the Centre for a specified duration.
- **Contravention of this provision** may attract a prison term that may go up to three years, besides a fine.
2. **When a direction is given for monitoring, interception or decryption**, the intermediary, should extend technical assistance in the form of giving access or securing access to the resource involved.

They must comply with the request to intercept or monitor or decrypt the information concerned.

- **Failure to extend such assistance may entail a prison term of up to seven years, besides a fine.**
  - **Failure to comply with a direction to block access** to the public on a government's written request also attracts a prison term of up to seven years, besides a fine.
3. **The Act also empowers the government** to collect and monitor data on traffic.
- When an authorised agency asks for technical assistance in this regard, the intermediary must comply with the request.
  - **Non-compliance may lead to a prison term of up to three years, besides a fine.**

**Is the liability of the intermediary absolute?**

No, it's not.

**Section 79 of the Act** makes it clear that **"an intermediary shall not be liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him"**.

- **This protects intermediaries** such as Internet and data service providers and those hosting websites from being made liable for content that users may post or generate.
- However, **the exemption from liability does not apply** if there is evidence that the intermediary abetted or induced the commission of the unlawful act involved.
- Also, **the provision casts a responsibility on intermediaries to remove the offensive content or block access** to it upon getting "actual knowledge" of an unlawful act being committed using their resources, or as soon as it is brought to their notice.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 12<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### THE NEW DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT IN EASTERN LADAKH

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

In the first major breakthrough in talks to resolve the **nine-month military standoff** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, China's Defence Ministry announced, recently, that **Chinese and Indian troops on the southern and northern shores of Pangong Tso began "synchronized and organized disengagement"** in line with the consensus reached between Corps Commanders when they last met on January 24.

## What is the new disengagement plan in eastern Ladakh?

As of now, the disengagement process seems **restricted to the north and south banks of Pangong Tso**.

- The process has started with the pulling back of certain columns of tanks from the south bank region by both sides.
- At the moment, there is **no pullback of troops from the friction points and the heights they are positioned on**. That will happen in a phased and verified manner.
- The ground commanders have started meeting since Tuesday to figure out the nitty-gritty of the process.



## What does this disengagement process entail?

Both sides **will remove the forward deployment in a phased, coordinated and verified manner**.

- China will pull its troops on the north bank towards the east of **Finger 8**.
- Similarly, India will also position its forces at its permanent base at the **Dhan Singh Thapa post near Finger 3**.
- Similar action will be taken by both the parties in the **south bank area as well**.
- Both sides have also agreed that the area between **Finger 3 and Finger 8 will become a no-patrolling zone temporarily**, till both sides reach an agreement through military and diplomatic discussions to restore patrolling.
- Further, all the construction done by both sides on the north and south banks of the lake since April 2020 will be removed.

## Why is this area important?

The north and south banks of Pangong Tso are **two of the most significant and sensitive regions** when it comes to the current standoff that began in May 2020.



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- It is one of the areas **where the Chinese troops had come around 8 km deep west of India's perception of the Line of Actual Control.**
- **China had positioned its troops on the ridgeline connecting Fingers 3 and 4,** while according to India the LAC passes through Finger 8.
- Further, **it is in the south bank of the lake that Indian forces in an action** in late August had gained strategic advantage by occupying certain peaks, outwitting the Chinese.
- **The Spanggur Gap,** which is a **two-km wide valley that can be used to launch an offensive,** as China had done in 1962, they also allow India a direct view of **China's Moldo Garrison.**

## Why has this taken so long?

Since September, **China has insisted that India first pull** its troops back from the south bank of Pangong Tso, and the Chushul sub-sector.

However, **India has been demanding that any disengagement process should include the entire region,** and troops should go back to their April 2020 positions.

However, it seems that for now both sides have agreed to first disengage from the Pangong Tso area only.

India demands the solution to the issue should be on the basis of three principles:

1. LAC should be accepted and respected by both the parties.
2. Neither party should attempt to change the status quo unilaterally.
3. All agreements should be fully adhered to by both parties.

## Does this mean that the standoff is resolved?

That's a clear no.

There are still some outstanding issues that remain regarding deployment and patrolling on LAC.

- Both sides agree that complete disengagement under bilateral agreements and protocols should be done as soon as possible.
- Both sides have agreed that "within 48 hours of complete disengagement from Pangong Lake, senior-commanders level talks should be held and the remaining issues should be resolved".
- The Pangong Tso region is just one of the friction areas. **There are other friction points,** all north of the Pangong Tso, where the troops have been face-to-face since last year.

## What are the hurdles?

Two of the main stumbling blocks in finding a permanent resolution are **lack of trust and no clarity on intent.**

- **Any permanent resolution will include first,** disengagement of troops from the frontlines from all friction points, then de-escalation that will entail sending the troops from the depth areas to their original bases.

- Both sides have around 50,000 troops in the region, along with additional tanks, artillery and air defence assets.

## Conclusion:

The agreement to finally disengage from the Pangong Tso area was reached in the ninth round of the senior commander talks on January 24.

The situation in Depsang Plains continues to be a concern.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 13<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

# THE PERILS OF DEREGULATED IMPERFECT AGRIMARKETS

## GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATED TO AGRICULTURE)

The massive farmers' protests across India against the Farm Acts has shocked those in the seat of power in Delhi.

- **According to the government**, many private markets will be established, middlemen would disappear, farmers would be free to sell to any buyer and farmgate prices would rise.
- The **protesting farmers do not accept these claims**. They believe that **farmgate prices would fall with the intensification of a corporate presence in agricultural markets**.
- They also believe that the government, ultimately, wants to phase out the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system.

## Need of more mandis:

An important assumption behind the 'Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 / (FPTC Act), is that mandis controlled by Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC) are monopsonies in rural areas.

- First, official data show that even for paddy and wheat, respectively, **only 29% and 44% of the harvest is sold in a mandi**, while 49% and 36% is sold to either a local private trader or an input dealer.
- In other words, de facto, a **large proportion of Indian harvest is not directly sold in a mandi**.

## Why the farmers sell their produce outside of Mandi?

Farmers are **forced to sell outside** the mandis for two reasons.

1. **The first** is that **there are not enough mandis**. In 1976, there were 4,145 large markets in India, with the average area served at 775 km<sup>2</sup>.

- The **National Commission on Agriculture (NCA)** had recommended that every Indian farmer should be able to reach a mandi in one hour by a cart. Thus, the **average area served by a mandi was to be reduced to 80 km<sup>2</sup>**.
  - For this, the number of mandis was to increase to at least 41,000. But **there were only 6,630 mandis in 2019 with an average area served of 463 km<sup>2</sup>**.
  - Using another set of criteria, a government committee in **2017 had recommended that India should have at least 10,130 mandis**. So, by all counts, India needs not less but more mandis.
2. **The second reason** is that most small and marginal farmers, given their small marketable surplus, do not find it economical **to bear the transport costs to take their harvests to mandis**.
- Thus, **they end up selling their harvest to a village trader even if at a lower price**.
  - Even if private markets replace mandis, small and marginal farmers will continue to sell to traders in the village itself.
  - The situation will change **only if economies of scale rise substantially at the farm-level**.

### **The poor private investment in markets**

The reason for poor private investment in markets is the **presence of high transaction costs in produce collection and aggregation**.

- When private players try to take over the role of mandis and the village trader, they incur considerable costs in opening collection centres and for salaries, grading, storage and transport.
- The more the number of small and marginal farmers are, the higher will these costs be.
- **Corporate retail chains face additional costs in urban sales and storage**, as well as the risk of perishability.
- This is why many retail chains **prefer purchasing bulk quantities of fruits and vegetables from mandis rather than directly from farmers**.

### **Transaction costs**

Even if private markets emerge, the size of transaction costs are likely to offset any decline in mandi taxes. As a result, **there is no assurance that farmers would receive a higher price in private markets**.

- In fact, **if transaction costs exceed mandi taxes**, the costs would be transferred to the farmers as a lower price.
- This, then, would imply a stronger squeeze on the farmer than at present

### **Significance of Mandi taxes**

Many commentaries treat taxes in mandis as wasteful. This assertion is not fully true.

1. First, much of the **mandi taxes are reinvested by APMCs to improve market infrastructure**. A fall in mandi taxes would reduce the surplus available with APMCs for such investment.

2. Second, in States such as Punjab, the **government charges a market committee fee and a rural development fee.**

The **Punjab Mandi Board uses these revenues** to construct rural roads, run medical and veterinary dispensaries, supply drinking water, improve sanitation, expand rural electrification and provide relief to farmers during calamities.

Such rural investments will also be adversely affected if mandis are weakened.

## **The fate of MSPs**

Without doubt, **MSPs would continue to survive on paper** as the government will have to procure to maintain a minimum buffer stock.

However, **many policy signals point to a strategic design to weaken the MSPs.**

1. **First, input and labour costs are rising** sharply in agriculture. This necessitates a regular upward revision of MSPs to keep pace with costs of living.
2. **Second, the government has not yet agreed to fix MSPs at 50%** above the C2 cost of production. As a result, farmers continue to suffer a price loss of ₹200 to ₹500 per quintal in many crops.
3. **Third, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)** has been recommending to the government that open-ended procurement of food grains should end. These policy stances have set alarm bells ringing among farmers.

In **Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh**, most crop sales are at the MSP through procurement centres including the mandis.

- If **mandis weaken and private markets with no commitment to MSPs expand**, they fear a gradual erosion of their entitlement to a remunerative price.
- If mandis weaken and private markets do not sufficiently replace them, they fear that the void would be filled by unscrupulous and unregulated traders.

## **Steps to be taken**

Discussions between the government and the farmers can be structured using a broad framework based on two focus points.

First, **India needs an increase in the density of mandis**, expansion of investment in mandi infrastructure and a spread of the MSP system to more regions and crops.

- This should happen hand-in-hand with a universalisation of the Public Distribution System as an affordable source of food for the poor.

**Second, we need not just more mandis, but also better mandis.**

- APMCs need internal reform to ease the entry of new players, reduce trader collusion and link them up with national e-trading platforms.
- The introduction of unified national licences for traders and a single point levy of market fees are also steps in the right direction.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KAILASH RANGE

#### GENERAL STUDIES - III (SECURITY CHALLENGES IN BORDER AREAS)

The Kailash Range was the **theatre of conflict during the 1962 Chinese offensive**, with **key battles at Rezang La and Gurung Hill**.

In 2020, **Indian troops secured Kailash Ridge** in an operation that took the Chinese by surprise. A look at the strategic importance of the mountain range, and the lessons learnt.

#### **Background:**

It was in early **October 1962** that **Chairman Mao Zedong** decided to launch a large-scale invasion to severely punish India.

- **While the main offensive was to be in the Eastern Sector, coordinated operations in the Western Sector were to be undertaken** to capture areas up to the 1960 Claim Line in eastern Ladakh, which entailed elimination of 43 Indian posts.
- **Gaining control over entire Aksai Chin** was essential to guarantee security of the Western Highway, linking Kashgarh in Xinjiang to Lhasa in Tibet.
- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) offensive began on October 20, 1962, simultaneously in the Eastern and Western Sectors.

The operations in Aksai Chin were executed in two phases:

1. **During Phase One** (October 20-28, 1962) PLA went on to clear Indian posts at **Daulat Beg Oldie, Galwan, astride both banks of Pangong Tso and Dungti-Demchok areas**.
2. **Phase Two** was launched after a tactical pause of three weeks on November 18, 1962 to capture the strategically **important Kailash Range**.

#### **The Kailash Range:**

The **Karakoram Range ends on the northern side of the Pangong Tso**.

- **The Kailash Range originates** from the southern bank and runs northwest to southeast for over 60 km.
- The Kailash Ridge is characterised by rugged, broken terrain with heights varying between 4,000-5,500m.
- **Its key features** include Helmet Top, Gurung Hill, Spanggur Gap, Muggar Hill, Mukhpari, Rezang La and Rechin La. The Ridge dominates Chushul Bowl; an important communications centre.

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## Reorganising India's defences:

- The lull following Phase One was utilised by the Indian Army to reorganise its defences.
- The 3 Infantry Division was raised at Leh on October 26, 1962 **under Major General Budh Singh.**
- The HQ of 114 Infantry Brigade was **moved to Chushul**, the 70 Infantry Brigade took over the responsibility of **Indus Valley Sub Sector**, and the 163 Infantry Brigade was inducted for the **Defence of Leh.**

## Chinese plan of attack:

The plan duly approved by the **Central Military Commission (CMC)** envisaged capturing both Rezang La and Gurung Hill simultaneously.

All these units had been in action during Phase One as well. As per instructions from the CMC, operations were to be confined to the positions on the ridge line only.

## Battle of Rezang La:

The **C Company of 13 Kumaon**, responsible for the defence of Rezang La.

The Chinese, **having carried out detailed reconnaissance of Rezang La**, planned to outflank the position at night and attack simultaneously from the northern and southern directions at first light.

- A fierce battle ensued, with the defender beating back successive Chinese attacks.
- With communication snapped and the position encircled, **leaving no possibility of the C Company being reinforced, it was "do and die" situation.**
- **Major Shaitan Singh**, the Company Commander, even launched a local counterattack.
- Finally, by employing reserves, the Chinese did manage to break through and Rezang La fell by 10 pm November 18.
- **It was an epic battle, literally fought to the "last man, last round".**
- **Major Shaitan Singh was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra.**

## Battle for Gurung Hill:

Gurung Hill was held by two companies of 1/8 GR located northeast at **Spanggur Gap.**

It was held by a company minus a platoon. The defences were well coordinated and covered by a protective minefield.

**The task to capture Gurung Hill was assigned to Ali Detachment**, the holding formation.

- The operation to capture Gurung Hill began on November 18, coordinated with the attack on Rezang La.
- In the face of **stiff resistance from Gorkhas** with tanks in a direct shooting role, the Chinese suffered heavy casualties and the attack was stalled.

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- On regrouping and reinforcements joining in, the PLA resumed the offensive again after a brief interval.
- The **position was captured by PLA towards last light on November 18**. The PLA could not capture the remaining part of Gurung Hill.

## August 2020: the present

The **course of history was set to reverse 58 years later** when on August 30, 2020, the **Special Frontier Force (SFF) troops secured Kailash Ridge as a pre-emptive operation**.

This action proved a game-changer, **neutralising gains made by the Chinese along the northern bank of Pangong Tso** and rendering PLA positions east of Spanggur Gap-Maldo Garrison totally vulnerable.

## The Kailash Ridge:

In 1962, it was on the Kailash Ridge that **Indian soldiers proved their mettle and made the PLA pay a heavy price**, despite being poorly equipped and ill-prepared.

- Today, given a **rich experience in high altitude-cum-glacial warfare**, coupled with vastly improved equipment and infrastructure, the Indian Army is well positioned to hold the Kailash Range for good.
- The Chinese, on the other hand, are beginning to realise the harsh realities of winters at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

## Probable reason of recent disengagement of PLA in this area:

Aware of the inability to regain Kailash Ridge with the current force level, and with **the window for launching major operations already foreclosed due to the onset of winter**, the Chinese may use all ploys to **negotiate the Indian Army's pull-back from south of Pangong Tso**.

- **India should be wary of past mistakes** and avoid falling into the Chinese trap.
- The **PLA's current aggression**, wherein it flouted a series of agreements signed between the countries over last three decades to unilaterally alter the status quo along the LAC, is a case in point.

## Conclusion:

The Kailash Ridge marks a tryst with history, a turning point, as **it is the first piece of territory that has been recovered from Chinese illegal occupation**, but definitely not the last one as India's claim line is the **Johnson Line of 1865**.

India was being tested in the seven-month-long standoff with China in eastern Ladakh. Therefore, it is time to convey a stern message to the Chinese leadership that **India will not compromise on its sovereignty**.

### OPENING UP THE GEO-SPATIAL SECTOR IN INDIA

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND ISSUES ARISING FROM IT)

The past decade has seen an increase in the use of geo-spatial data in daily life with various apps such as food delivery apps like Swiggy or Zomato, e-commerce like Amazon or even weather apps.

- The **Ministry of Science and Technology**, recently, has released **new guidelines for the Geo-spatial sector in India**.
- With these guidelines, the existing protocol and liberalises the sector has been deregulates to a more competitive field.

#### What is geo-spatial data?

Geospatial data is **data about objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface** of the earth.

- The location may be static, like the location of a road, **an earthquake event, malnutrition among children, or dynamic like a moving vehicle or pedestrian, the spread of an infectious disease**.
- **Geospatial data combines** location information, attribute information (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned).
- **It also include** temporal information or the time at which the location and attributes exist.
- Geo-spatial data usually involves information of public interest such as roads, localities, rail lines, water bodies, and public amenities.

GIS mapping was also rudimentary, with the government investing heavily in it after the Kargil war highlighted the dependence on foreign data and the need for indigenous sources of data.

#### The present policy on geo-spatial data:

**There are strict restrictions** on the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data and mapping under the current regime.

- The policy **had not been renewed in decades** and has been driven by internal as well as external security concerns.
- The **sector so far is dominated by the Indian government as well as government-run agencies** such as the Survey of India.
- The **private companies need to navigate a system of permissions from different departments** of the government as well as the defence and Home Ministries, to be able to collect, create or disseminate geo-spatial data.



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- **Initially conceptualised as a matter solely concerned with security**, geo-spatial data collection was the prerogative of the defence forces and the government.

## **Why has the government deregulated geo-spatial data?**

This **system of acquiring licenses or permission, and the red tape involved**, can take months, delaying projects, especially those that are in mission mode – for both Indian companies as well as government agencies.

- The **deregulation eliminates the requirement of permissions** as well as scrutiny, even for security concerns.
- **Indian companies now can self-attest**, conforming to government guidelines **without actually having to be monitored by a government agency**– these guidelines therefore place a great deal of trust in Indian entities.

## **Need for:**

- There is a **huge lack of data in the country** which impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses which are data-based.
- The **mapping of the entire country that too with high accuracy, by the Indian government alone could take decades.**
- The government therefore felt an **urgent need to incentivise the geo-spatial sector for Indian companies and increased investment from private players in the sector.**

## **Implications:**

- By liberalising the system, the **government will ensure more players in the field**, competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market, and more accurate data available to both the government to formulate plans and administer, but also for individual Indians.
- Start-ups and businesses can now also use this data in setting up their concerns, **especially in the sector of e-commerce or geo-spatial based apps.**
- **Indian companies will be able to develop indigenous apps**, for example an **Indian version of google maps.**

## **Way forward:**

There is also **likely to be an increase in public-private partnerships** with the opening of this sector with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects.

The government also expects an **increase in investment in the geo-spatial sector by companies**, and also an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn will boost the economy.

### WHO TEAM'S FIELD VISIT TO CHINA

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO HEALTH)

After several months of delay, concerns over access, and bickering between China and the U.S., a **17-member team from the World Health Organisation** began a field visit on January 29, 2021.

- The objective of the team was **to unearth the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus** that has so far spread to over 108 million people and killed nearly 2.4 million people across the globe.
- According to the WHO, the field visits included the **Wuhan Institute of Virology, the Huanan market, and the Wuhan CDC** (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) laboratory.
- It said the team was **“limited to visits organised by Chinese hosts and had no contact with community members, because of health restrictions”**.

#### **What are the four scenarios of virus origin that were investigated?**

The WHO team undertook scientific investigations to look at **four main scenarios for the origin** of the virus.

1. **The first possibility** is that a single individual had got infected with the virus through direct contact with bats and then spread it to others before the virus made its way to Wuhan.
2. **The second scenario** is of the virus crossing the species barrier from bats to humans through an intermediary species, which has still not been found.
3. **The third possibility** is that the virus originated outside China and spread to Wuhan through imported frozen food, and
4. **The fourth scenario** is that the virus leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which has been studying coronaviruses.

#### **When and where did the outbreak begin in China?**

Though the **first cluster of cases was reported from Wuhan in December**, early data suggest that the virus could have been circulating in the Chinese city for several weeks before it was identified.

- According to the WHO, there have not been any large-scale outbreaks in the Chinese city or outside before December 2019.
- The team has not ruled out the possibility of the virus circulating in other regions well before December 2019.

#### **What role did the Huanan wet market play?**

- The first cluster of cases reported in Wuhan had **links to the wet market**, it soon became apparent that several infected people did not have any link to it.

- There is **not enough evidence to determine** how the virus entered the wet market, but there are **two likely possibilities** — the virus was introduced into the market either through one or more infected people or through frozen food.

## Has the possibility of a lab-leak been ruled out?

- The WHO fact-finding team had **initially rejected the possibility of a lab-leak** saying it is “extremely unlikely” and that further investigation into it was not required.
- However, at a press briefing, **WHO Chief Tedros A. Ghebreyesus** said that upon discussing with a few team members “all hypotheses [including the lab-leak] remain open and require further analysis and studies”.

## Did the virus directly jump from bats to humans?

The investigation by the WHO team strongly suggests that **though bats were the reservoirs of the virus**, it is unlikely that the virus jumped directly from bats to humans.

- The virus may have crossed from bats to another animal species and finally to humans.
- The **direct spill over of the virus from bats to humans is unlikely** as Wuhan is miles away from any natural bat habitat. The team has **not been able to find the intermediary host**.

## What do the genome sequence data reveal about the virus origin?

Based on the **analysis of public genome sequence data from SARS-CoV-2** and related viruses, scientists **have not found any evidence that the virus was made in a laboratory** or engineered by humans.

## Inferences:

Although showing differences in sequence similarity, **SARS-CoV-2 looks very much like a natural virus transferred from the same horseshoe bat species** as the first SARS virus, and is now evolving as would be expected in the human population.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 18<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

# NATIONAL HYDROGEN MISSION

## GENERAL STUDIES - II (CONSERVATION)

One of the major initiatives for the clean energy sector that the government announced in the Union Budget 2021, was the plan to launch a **National Hydrogen Mission**.

- Though the plan was lined up, the Budget did not specify the details of the scheme and what India’s ambitions were towards it.
- The proposal in the Budget will be followed up with a **mission draft** over the next couple of months.

## Efforts in India so far on transportation:

- In October, Delhi became the first Indian city to operate buses running on hydrogen spiked compressed natural gas (H-CNG) in a six-month pilot project.
- The buses will run on a new technology patented by Indian Oil Corp for producing **H-CNG — 18 per cent hydrogen in CNG** — directly from natural gas, without resorting to conventional blending.
- **Power major NTPC Ltd** is operating a pilot to run 10 hydrogen fuel cell-based electric buses and fuel cell electric cars in Leh and Delhi, and
- NTPC is also **considering setting up a green hydrogen production facility in Andhra Pradesh.**
- **Indian Oil Corporation (IOC)** is also planning to set up a dedicated unit to produce hydrogen to run buses at its R&D centre in Faridabad.
- **As a supporting regulatory framework**, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways late last year issued a notification proposing amendments to the **Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989**, to include safety evaluation standards for hydrogen fuel cell-based vehicles.

## Hydrogen:

Hydrogen's potential as a **clean fuel source** has a history spanning nearly 150 years.

- The most common element **in nature is not found freely.**
- Hydrogen **exists only combined with other elements**, and has to be extracted from naturally occurring compounds like water (which is a combination of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom).
- Although hydrogen is a clean molecule, the **process of extracting it is energy-intensive.**
- The sources and processes by which hydrogen is derived, are categorised by colour tabs.

## its types:

- **Grey hydrogen:** Hydrogen **produced from fossil fuels** is called **grey hydrogen**; this constitutes the bulk of the hydrogen produced today.
- **Blue hydrogen:** Hydrogen **generated from fossil fuels** with carbon capture and storage options is called **blue hydrogen**;
- **Green hydrogen:** hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called green hydrogen.

In the last process, electricity generated from renewable energy is used to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

## The case for green hydrogen:

Green hydrogen has specific advantages.

1. One, it is a **clean burning molecule**, which can decarbonise a range of sectors including iron and steel, chemicals, and transportation.
2. Two, **renewable energy that cannot be stored** or used by the grid can be channelled to produce hydrogen.

## Background of government's Hydrogen Energy Mission:

India's electricity grid is predominantly coal-based and will continue to be so.

- Thus, it is **negating collateral benefits from a large-scale EV push**, because coal will have to be burnt to generate the electricity that will power these vehicles.
- Experts believe **hydrogen vehicles can be especially effective in long-haul trucking** and other hard-to-electrify sectors such as shipping and long-haul air travel.
- **Using heavy batteries in these applications would be counterproductive**, especially for countries such as India, where the electricity grid is predominantly coal-fired.

## How will the mission work?

For the current financial year, MNRE has been allotted Rs 25 crore for research and development (R&D) in hydrogen.

Once the draft of the mission is in place, it will be floated for public consultation.

There will be **five key areas the government will focus on**; These include:

1. R&D,
2. demand creation,
3. how it can be used in industry,
4. how to create an eco-system including policies for this and
5. how to bring industry on board along with international partnerships.

## Agenda for next five years:

- In these five areas, demand creation will focus on what kind of niche products can be taken up and how effectively the fuel can be used in trucks and buses.
- In the industrial sector, the government is looking at **hydrogen as a replacement for coke in the steel industry** and also making use of the fuel in the fertiliser sector.
- MNRE has indicated that by 2025-26, the industrial sector will be one of the major recipients of hydrogen.

## How hydrogen fuel cells work?

South Korea and Japan especially, are focussed on moving their automotive markets to hydrogen, and the potential of the fuel cell.

- **Hydrogen is an energy carrier, not a source of energy.**
- Hydrogen fuel must be **transformed into electricity by a device called a fuel cell** stack before it can be used to power a car or truck.
- A **fuel cell converts chemical energy into electrical energy** using oxidising agents through an oxidation-reduction reaction.
- Fuel cell-based vehicles most commonly combine hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity to power the electric motor on board.
- Since fuel cell vehicles use electricity to run, they are considered electric vehicles.

- **Hydrogen fuel cell cars have a near zero carbon footprint.**
- Hydrogen is about two to three times as efficient as burning petrol, because an electric chemical reaction is much more efficient than combustion.

## **FCEVs and other EVs:**

**Electric vehicles (EVs) are typically bracketed into four broad categories:**

1. **Conventional hybrid electric vehicles or HEVs**, combine a conventional internal combustion engine system with an electric propulsion system, resulting in a hybrid vehicle drivetrain that substantially lowers fuel usage.

The onboard battery in a conventional hybrid is charged when the IC engine is powering the drivetrain.

2. **Plug-in hybrid vehicles or PHEVs**, have a hybrid drivetrain that uses an IC engine and electric power for motive power, backed by rechargeable batteries which can be plugged into a power source.
3. **Battery powered electric vehicles or BEVs**, such as Nissan Leaf or Tesla Model S have no IC engine or fuel tank, and run on a fully electric drivetrain powered by rechargeable batteries.
4. **Fuel cell electric vehicles or FCEVs**, use hydrogen gas to power an on-board electric motor. FCEVs combine hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity, which runs the motor.

Since they're powered entirely by electricity, FCEVs are considered EVs, but unlike BEVs, their range and refuelling processes are comparable to conventional cars and trucks.

The major difference between a BEV and a hydrogen FCEV is that the **latter enables a refuelling time of just five minutes**, compared to 30-45 minutes charging for a BEV.

## **Challenges:**

- A big barrier to the adoption of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles has been a **lack of fuelling station infrastructure**.
- There are fewer than 500 operational hydrogen stations in the world today, mostly in Europe, followed by Japan and South Korea.
- **Safety is seen as a concern**. Hydrogen is pressurised and stored in a cryogenic tank, from there it is fed to a lower-pressure cell and put through an electro-chemical reaction to generate electricity.

## **Way forward:**

Scaling up the technology and achieving critical mass remains the big challenge. More vehicles on the road and more supporting infrastructure can lower costs. India's proposed mission is seen as a step in that direction.

### IMPORTANCE OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IN AN ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (CONSERVATION)

Migratory birds are seasonal guests with positive impacts. **Birds from 29 countries fly to India every year.** The country witnesses **incoming of large flocks during September-October** signifying the beginning of migration.

#### About the Migratory bird species:

Migratory bird species are known to be **indicators for the flyway region**, as they use different biomes and habitats and face different pressures along the migration route.

The **Central Asian Flyway covers 30 countries, including India**, at the tail end with huge landmass and habitat variations, especially the wetlands.

#### Migration of Birds:

As **daylight shrinks and food supply dwindles at the breeding sites**, the birds take the cue and **start migrating towards wintering sites in the South.**

- The **return journey** begins in March or April.
- Migration is also an **adaptation mechanism to help birds overcome weather adversities and unavailability of food** in colder regions.
- **Birds often migrate to and from specific sites** and hence, certain regions become identified with certain species.

#### Migratory birds sites in India:

According to the Government of India, as many as **1,349 species of birds have been recorded as of 2019**, of which **78 are endemic to the country and 212 species are globally threatened.**

- **Pallikaranai in Chennai** attracts a large number of flamingoes, ducks and waders.
- **Pulicat Lake on the Tamil Nadu-Andhra border** hosts flamingoes; ducks and waders can be seen in **Chilika lagoon** in Odisha.
- Other notable sites to see migratory birds are the **Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur** in Rajasthan and **Khijadia Bird Sanctuary in Jamnagar** in Gujarat.

#### Importance of migratory birds:

The importance of bird migrations on the **health of the ecosystems** is well-established.

Migratory birds play several essential and indispensable roles in the ecosystems they reside in and travel through.

# CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- Such birds raising broods end up acting as pest control agents by devouring insects and other organisms that harm the environment and crops.
- **Locust attack is one such disaster that stems from that absence of birds.**
- Migratory birds help in dispersal of seeds, leading to maintenance of biodiversity along their routes.
- The droppings of birds, also known as guano, are rich in nitrogen and act as organic fertilizers. Egg shells can add calcium and other minerals.
- Migratory birds form both prey and predator bases in ecosystems seasonally and can, therefore, have an ecological impact.
- Prevalence of migratory birds helps analyse the state of environment in an area.

## Concerns:

- Migratory birds require nesting places and sufficient food for successful broods.
- Accelerated habitat loss during the last decade, including decreased area under water bodies, wetlands, natural grasslands and forests, have proved to be major impediments for them.
- **Overexploitation**, unsustainable use of natural resource, population explosion along with increased weather variabilities and climate change has resulted in loss of biodiversity.
- These factors have also adversely impacted the entire life cycle and survival of migratory birds.
- New approaches are needed to prevent the ill-effects and altered migration patterns of birds.

## Challenges:

- In several parts of the world where they travel through or are resident, their eggs are poached and hunted down.
- Locals unaware of the benefits provided by migratory birds often indulge in behavior adverse to survival of birds.
- Affluent people indulge in bird poaching to please their palate without giving any consideration to environmental consequences.
- Loss of one mate can result in the death of the other and loss of the brood due to starvation affecting an entire family of birds and future generations.
- Along with loss of water bodies and wild habitats, the dwindling of minor habitats in the vicinities of towns and villages, where smaller flocks often take refuge, is a major concern.
- Increasing illumination at night adversely affects migration by confusing the birds.
- Degradation of the environment and increased pollutant levels jeopardise the life cycle and migration of birds.
- Heavy pollution of water bodies and presence of large amounts of pesticides leads to improper hatching and the loss of broods.



## Possible interventions:

**Long-term monitoring programmes** to assess the migration trends in birds, diseases monitoring and enumeration.

- **Educating school children, youth and the public on the importance of bird migrations** and their impacts. Seeking local support for nesting and conservation of migratory birds.
- **Fishing activity to be minimised / abandoned / banned in the estuaries**, rivers and water bodies during the migration season.
- **Adoption of sustainable organic agriculture practices** by farmers to ensure chemical free water bodies and pesticide free prey base.
- **Conservation of wetlands**, grasslands, natural habitats and forests with native species to help birds roost and build their nests.
- **Minimising night lights** along the migration paths.
- **Promoting eco-clubs and citizens initiatives** for awareness, conservation and protection of migratory birds and their natural habitats.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 20<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### SAKA NANKANA SAHIB, AND WHY IT MATTERS IN SIKH HISTORY

#### GENERAL STUDIES - I (MODERN INDIAN HISTORY)

The **centenary of Sri Nankana Sahib massacre**, which is popularly known as Saka Nankana Sahib, is being marked in an event there on February 21 this year.

Nankana Sahib, the **birth place of first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev**, was also the site of the first big agitation by the SGPC to **take back control of gurdwaras from mahants backed by the British**.

#### Background:

- The **SGPC came to existence in November 1920**, a month after Sikhs removed partial restrictions on Dalit rights inside Golden Temple in Amritsar.
- It started **gurdwara reform movement** which was aimed at taking possession of historical Sikh Gurdwaras, which had turned personal property of the priests, who were called mahants.
- These mahants were also accused of running practices from gurdwaras which were not approved in Sikhism.

## Efforts to free Nankana Sahib:

- **Mahant Narain Das** was in control of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib.
- Newly formed SGPC asked him to improve the administration of gurdwaras in **October 1920**. However, the mahant took it as challenge to his authority and started equipping himself with arms and fortified the gurdwara.
- **SGPC leader was attacked by mahant's men inside gurdwara** on birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji in presence of British officials in November 1920. But no action was taken against the mahant.
- **Sikh leaders made attempts to bring mahant to the negotiation table** but their efforts failed.

## The February massacre:

All the mahants and other groups, who were in control of Sikh gurdwaras, also organised themselves and started holding meetings called "**Sikh Sanatan Conference**" against any move of the SGPC to take control away from them.

- Some **motivated Sikh leaders took it as an opportunity to take control of the Gurdwara Nankana Sahiba** as Mahant Narain Das would be busy in Lahore.
- **Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders** tried to stop the Sikh jatha on the way to Nankana Sahib but failed to convince the leaders leading the **jatha**.
- The **unarmed Sikh jatha entered inside the gurdwara and with a plan to take possession of gurdwara in a non-violent manner**.
- As the jatha entered the gurdwara, all the gates were closed. **Around 60 Sikhs were killed in the main hall**. 25 bodies were found in a single room.
- A 12-year-old survived the attack after he managed to hide under the palanquin on which Guru Granth Sahib was installed.
- Total number of casualties stood between 150 to 200.

## Taking control of the gurdwara:

After the incident, Mahant Narain Das ran away. The incident, however, created an impression among Sikhs that the British government had played a hidden part in this massacre.

- All the prominent Sikh leaders reached Nankana Sahib on February 21, 1921.
- Initially, police and Army tried to stop the jatha, but later Sikhs were allowed to take control of the gurdwara.
- The then Punjab Governor and his council members also reached **Nankana Sahib on February 22 and ordered handing over control of gurdwara to Sikhs**.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** reached Nankana Sahib on March 3, 1921.
- Gandhi said that the British government was part of this massacre. He also said that cruelty of this massacre was more than that of Jallianwala Bagh.

## SGPC movement takes first political turn:

- The SGPC formed its **own probe team** and asked Mahatma Gandhi to be part of it.
- **Gandhi asked Sikh leaders to give support to the non-cooperation movement** of the Congress party.
- On March 6, 1921 a resolution was passed and **decided to support the non-cooperation movement** being run by Mahatma Gandhi.
- The British government was not amused with the decision of SGPC leadership to be part of a political movement and **Sikh leaders were arrested from Nankana Sahib for allegedly taking illegal control of gurdwaras** on March 15, 1921.
- In May 1921, SGPC asked Sikhs to wear black clothes and turbans as protest against British government.

## End of the movement:

The court found Mahant and his men guilty in just six months and main accused were sentenced to death. Later, death sentence was commuted to life term. Mahant was released from jail in 1930.

However, Nankana Sahib Gurdwara agitation was just a big leap in Gurdwara Reform movement followed by Guru Ka Bagh Morcha and other agitations till Sikh Gurdwara Act came into existence in 1925.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 22<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### THE NEW DISINVESTMENT POLICY AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SECTOR ENTERPRISES

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

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2021-22, **announced a new policy for central public sector enterprises (CPSEs)**, which she said will serve as a **clear roadmap for disinvestment of government-owned firms across sectors**.

#### What goes outside government control?

The government had revealed the **broad contours of the policy** in May 2020 as part of the **Atmanirbhar Bharat package** unveiled in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **The strategic sectors identified** at the time for retaining certain public sector entities within the government's control remain the same in the final policy approved by the Cabinet.
- **These are atomic energy, space and defence, transport and telecommunications, power, petroleum, coal and other minerals, and lastly, banking, insurance and financial services.**

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- While the initial plan was to retain one to four public sector firms in these sectors, this has now been replaced by the phrase “**bare minimum presence**”.

## **Bare minimum presence:**

- Once the government will decide what is the ‘bare minimum number of firms’ it wants to retain, **the rest of the firms will be privatised, merged or subsidiarised with other CPSEs, or closed.**
- **For all firms in sectors considered non-strategic,** privatisation or closure are the only two options being considered.

## **The policy’s objective:**

- The policy’s objective is **to minimise the public sector’s role and create new investment space for the private sector.**
- It hope that the infusion of private capital, technology and management practices will contribute to growth and new jobs.
- The **proceeds from the sale of these firms** would finance various government-run social sector and developmental programmes.

## **The Push for disinvestment:**

A bold push for disinvestment of the public sector was expected soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014 and announced that **the government had “no business to be in business”.**

- However, **the first term saw little activity by the government on this front,** barring an aborted attempt to sell 76% of its stake in the loss-ridden national carrier Air India.
- **A few public sector enterprises were merged with other PSEs** and the proceeds from the transactions counted as disinvestment proceeds in the government’s accounts.

**In its second innings,** however, there has been some enthusiasm to privatise:

- A fresh push to sell Air India (lock stock and barrel, with 100% stake sale),
- Maharatna oil PSU Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) and
- The likes of Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India and Pawan Hans.

## **Why is this significant?**

The new policy is significant as it goes beyond such an approach and **lays down a rationale for deciding the future ownership pattern of 439 CPSEs,** including their subsidiaries.

- For instance, it is now clear that **151 public sector firms in non-strategic sectors** (including 83 holding companies and 68 subsidiaries) **will either be closed or sold.**
- The policy also **brings public sector banks and insurance entities into the disinvestment ambit for the first time.**

## How is this different from policies in the past?

This is the first time since 2004 that India is working on a slew of privatisation deals.

Earlier, the **Atal Bihari Vajpayee government between 1999 and 2004 had managed to sell off majority stakes** in a dozen-odd public sector enterprises, including Modern Foods, Balco, Hindustan Zinc, VSNL and a few hotels.

- A separate Ministry had been formed just for disinvestment to drive the process.
- An attempt to sell Air India at the time had, however, got stalled in the face of a political outcry.
- **Prior to that, the early 1990s** saw the stock market listing of minority stakes in a bunch of public sector firms, a policy that was replayed when the UPA government was in office from 2004 to 2014.
- **The new policy goes beyond the Vajpayee-era privatisation drive**, which was limited to a 'case-by-case' sale of entities in non-strategic sectors.
- It is stressing that **even strategic sectors will have a 'bare minimum' presence of government-owned firms.**

## What is likely to be sold?

The government hopes to conclude the **sale of Air India, BPCL and some other entities**, where some progress has already been made over the past year.

- Sitharaman also promised the **sale of two more public sector banks and a general insurance player** in her Budget speech, along with plans to list the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India on the stock markets.
- The **Union Budget has estimated ₹1.75 lakh crore as receipts from PSU stake sales** in the year, compared to its target of ₹2.10 lakh crore for 2020-21, of which just about ₹20,000 crore has been raised so far.
- However, the Finance Ministry mandarins are confident of achieving next year's target.

## The proposed process for selecting the CPSEs to be sold or retained:

**The NITI Aayog has been entrusted** with suggesting which public sector firms in strategic sectors should be retained, considered for privatisation or merger or 'subsidiarisation' with another public sector firm, or simply closed.

- **A core group of secretaries on disinvestment** will consider the NITI Aayog's suggestions and forward its views to a ministerial group.
- **Member of core group:** Apart from the Finance Minister, the group will include Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari and the minister in charge of the administrative ministry of the public sector enterprise concerned.
- **After the ministerial group's nod**, the **Department of Investment and Public Asset Management** in the Finance Ministry will move a proposal to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for an 'in-principle' nod to sell specific CPSEs.
- The NITI Aayog is expected to soon formalise its recommendations on which of the 77 public sector companies in strategic sectors should remain with the government.

## What are the risk factors?

- The **turmoil in the global economy could impact the valuations of firms** being privatised, as many potential investors may not have the appetite for bidding in these times.
- The **prospect of post-deal scrutiny** by audit and investigating agencies, like the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) and the CBI, will be a source of worry for officials, with similar cases pertaining to the Vajpayee-era transactions still cropping up in courts.

## Conclusion:

Lastly, the economists has warned, **privatisation is a good idea, but doing it during a recession may dampen economic recovery as investors** will end up buying existing capacities instead of embarking on fresh investments.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### LOSS OF TRUST: ON THE TRUST VOTE IN PUDUCHERRY

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (PARLIAMENT AND STATE LEGISLATURES – STRUCTURE)

The month-long political instability in Puducherry has ended with the **resignation of Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy on Monday after he failed to prove his majority on the floor of the House.**

#### Background:

The Narayanasamy Ministry **had a comfortable majority with 19 members in the 33-member Assembly.**

- The disqualification of a Congress MLA in July last year did not make any difference to the situation. But, in the last one month, **six MLAs from the Congress-DMK combine** quit the House.
- Among them were **two Ministers and a couple of MLAs who gave up their seats just a day before the floor test.**
- Two of those who quit the Assembly have since joined the BJP.

Puducherry Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan has asked Chief Minister V Narayanasamy to prove his government's majority in the Vidhan Sabha.

#### What is a floor test?

A floor test is a constitutional mechanism.

- It is used to determine if the incumbent government enjoys the support of the legislature.
- This voting process happen in the state's Legislative Assembly or the Lok Sabha at the central level.

## Need for:

- A democratically elected government must enjoy the confidence of Parliament or State Assembly in order to stay in power.
- At times, certain political equations put a question mark on the credibility of the ruling party and that's when the party finds it obligatory to know whether it still enjoys the confidence of the House.

## Floor test / Trust Vote in Lok Sabha:

In Lok Sabha, trust vote is **generally sought during the first session** with the newly elected government at the helm.

- This voting is considered as the **ideal mechanism to understand whether a party or a coalition commands a majority** in the House.
- Vote of trust **can also be optimised at any time during the five-year tenure** of the House if **it appears that the ruling party has lost its majority** or for some reasons the support base of the Prime Minister (PM) has depleted.
- The **process of trust vote is initiated by the PM** by moving a resolution seeking support for his government.
- If some MPs remain absent or abstain from voting, the majority is counted on the basis of those present and voting. This effectively reduces the strength of the House and in turn brings down the majority-mark.
- **The voting process can happen** orally, with electronic gadgets or a ballot process.

## What Happens When The Government Loses Trust Vote?

- The government is expected to resign if it loses a trust vote.
- In case its refuses to do so, **the President has the power to remove the PM.**
- In the history of Indian Parliament, **no Prime Minister has been forcibly removed so far.**
- After a **government loses a trust vote and resigns, it will still continue to function**, but as a **caretaker government** retaining almost the same powers as it had before the voting.

## Trust Vote in Vidhan Sabha:

Like the PM, the **Chief Minister also stays in power as long as it retains the confidence** of the state Assembly.

- The **Trust Vote or Confidence Vote is proposed by the party in power** in order to demonstrate that it still enjoys the support of the majority of MLAs.
- This initiative is often looked upon **as a strategy of the state government to pre-empt a no-confidence motion** by the opposition parties.
- If the results of the trust vote don't appear to be in favour of the ruling party, the **Governor of the state orders resignation of the Chief Minister** and new Assembly elections are sought.

## What is the Composite floor test?

The Composite floor test, is necessitated **when more than one person stake the claim to form the government** and the majority is not clear.

- Governor may call a special session to assess who has the majority.
- The majority is counted based on those present and voting and this can be done through voice vote also.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### NEED FOR CONCLUSIVE LAND TITLING IN INDIA

#### GENERAL STUDIES - III (LAND REFORMS IN INDIA)

The **Centre wants to reform the country's land markets** through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded.

- In 2020, even as laws for **farm reform and labour code reform** were being enacted, the government's think tank, NITI Aayog, took steps to initiate land reforms.
- A **Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling** was sent to States and Union Territories last June seeking their comments.
- In September, after many States failed to send in their feedback, the Centre warned that their agreement would be presumed.
- The Special Cell on Land Policy at **NITI Aayog was chaired by agricultural economist T. Haque.**
- He recommended a shift to conclusive titling in a 2017 report.

#### How does the current system work?

India currently follows a system of **presumptive land titling.**

- This means that **land records are maintained, with information on possession**, which is determined through details of past transactions.
- **Ownership**, then, is established on the basis of current possession.
- **Registration of land** is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.
- Holding registration papers **does not actually involve the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land or the government.**

#### What will change in the new system?

On the other hand, **under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership.**

- The **title is granted by the government**, which takes the responsibility for accuracy.



- Once a title is granted, **any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government**, not the title holder.
- Further, **under conclusive land titling**, the government may provide compensation to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership.

## **Need for conclusive land titling:**

The main advantage is that a conclusive system will **drastically lower litigation related to land**.

- According to a **2007 World Bank study** on ‘**Land Policies for growth and poverty reduction**’, land-related disputes accounted for two-thirds of all pending court cases in India.
- A **NITI Aayog study** on strengthening arbitration estimated that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.
- Right now, **because land titles are based on transactions**, people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership.

## **Impact:**

**According to dr. Haque**, the potential impact is extensive.

- Once conclusive titling is in place, **investors who want to purchase land for business activities** will be able to do so without facing the constant risk that their ownership may be questioned and their entire investment may go to waste.
- The **spectre of long-running court cases** currently stifles the appetite for investment in many sectors of the economy.
- The idea is to promote an active land market.

## **Hurdles caused by presumptive land titling:**

Land disputes and unclear titling also **create hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction**, leading to costly delays and inefficiency.

- In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available.
- **Ambiguity in ownership** also results in a black market for land transactions, which deprives the government of taxes.
- In rural areas, **access to agricultural credit is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral**
- Without being able to prove their ownership of land and access formal credit from banks, small and marginal farmers are often left at the mercy of unscrupulous moneylenders, entrenching themselves in a mountain of debt.

## What does the model Bill propose?

**Key features of the Bill circulated by the NITI Aayog in 2020:**

- **Land Authorities to be set up** by each State government.
- **A Title Registration Officer (TRO)** will be appointed to prepare and publish a draft list of land titles based on existing records and documents.
- This will be considered a valid notice to all potential claimants interested in the property, who will have to file their claims or objections within a set period of time.
- **Land Dispute Resolution Officer (LDRO):** If disputing claims are received, the TRO will verify all the relevant documents and refer the case to a Land Dispute Resolution Officer (LDRO) for resolution.
- However, **disputes which are already pending in courts cannot be resolved** in this way.
- Having considered and resolved all the disputed claims, the Land Authority will publish a Record of Titles.
- Over a three-year period, **these titles and the decisions of the TRO and the LDRO can be challenged before Land Titling Appellate Tribunals**, which will be set up under the law.
- After a three-year period, entries in the Record of Titles will be considered conclusive proof of ownership.
- Further appeals can only be taken up in High Courts.

## What are the challenges?

The biggest challenge is that **land records have not been updated for decades**, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

- Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance.
- Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.

## Way forward:

The **comprehensive village-level surveys** with community involvement are a necessary precursor to the land titling process.

- Relying on current records or **even satellite imagery** will not provide the same accuracy as actual, on-the-ground, local surveys.
- If surveys are not conducted, the onus falls on village claimants, many of whom have no access to documentation, to proactively challenge the titling during the three-year period.

### NITI AAYOG'S DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON MIGRANT WORKERS

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO POVERTY AND HUNGER)

The plight of millions of migrants during the Covid-19 lockdown has renewed the debate about a national policy on unorganised sector workers.

Spurred by the **exodus of 10 million migrants** (as per government estimates) from big cities during the Covid-19 lockdown, **NITI Aayog**, along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, **has prepared a draft national migrant labour policy.**

#### **A rights-based approach:**

The draft describes two approaches to policy design:

1. one focussed on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations;
2. The other, enhances the agency and capability of the community and thereby remove aspects that come in the way of an individual's own natural ability to thrive.

The policy rejects a handout approach, opting instead for a rights-based framework. It seeks to remove restrictions on true agency and potential of the migrant workers.

#### **Issues with existing law:**

The 2017 report argued that specific protection legislation for migrant workers was unnecessary. Report said, Migrant workers should be integrated with all workers...as part of an overarching framework that covers regular and contractual work.

It discussed the **limitations of The Inter State Migrant Workers Act, 1979:**

- This law was designed **to protect labourers from exploitation by contractors** by safeguarding their right to non-discriminatory wages, travel and displacement allowances, and suitable working conditions.
- However, this law — **which was modeled on a 1975 Odisha law** — covered only labourers migrating through a contractor, and left out independent migrants.

**The NITI Aayog's policy draft**, mentions that the Ministry of Labour and Employment should amend the 1979 Act for "effective utilisation to protect migrants".

#### **Governance nuts and bolts:**

The NITI draft lays down institutional mechanisms to coordinate between Ministries, states, and local departments to implement programmes for migrants.

It identifies the **Ministry of Labour and Employment as the nodal Ministry** for implementation of policies, and asks it to create a special unit to help converge the activities of other Ministries.

### The draft suggests:

- Migration focal points should be created in various Ministries,
- On the inter-state migration management bodies, labour departments of source and destination states along major migration corridors, should work together through the migrant worker cells.
- Labour officers from source states can be deputed to destinations.

### The importance of data:

Both the 2017 report and the new draft stress the need for credible data.

- The draft calls for a central database to help employers “fill the gap between demand and supply” and ensure “maximum benefit of social welfare schemes”.
- It asks the Ministries and the Census office **to be consistent with the definitions of migrants and subpopulations, capture seasonal and circular migrants, and incorporate migrant-specific variables** in existing surveys.
- Both documents **see limited merit in Census data** that comes only once a decade.
- The 2017 report **called on the Registrar General of India to release migration data** no more than a year after the initial tabulation, and to include sub-district level, village level, and caste data.
- It also asked the **National Sample Survey Office to include questions related to migration** in the periodic labour force survey, and to carry out a separate survey on migration.

### Preventing exploitation:

The policy draft describes a **lack of administrative capacity to handle issues of exploitation**.

- **State labour departments** have little engagement with migration issues, and are in “halting human trafficking mode”, the draft says.
- The draft **points to the legal support and registrations** tracking potential exploitation and flags the poor supervision of migration trends by anti-trafficking units in states.

### Specific recommendations:

- The draft asks **the Ministries of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, and Housing and Urban Affairs** to use Tribal Affairs migration data to help create migration resource

centres in high migration zones. It asks the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to focus on skill-building at these centres.

- The **Ministry of Education** should take measures under the Right to Education Act to mainstream migrant children's education, to map migrant children, and to provide local-language teachers in migrant destinations.
- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should address** issues of night shelters, short-stay homes, and seasonal accommodation for migrants in cities.
- The **National Legal Services authority (NALSA) and Ministry of Labour** should set up grievance handling cells and fast track legal responses for trafficking, minimum wage violations, and workplace abuses and accidents for migrant workers.

## EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 26<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021

### THE ABSURDITY OF THE ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

#### GENERAL STUDIES - II (PARLIAMENT AND STATE LEGISLATURES – STRUCTURE)

The **events in Puducherry** highlight, yet again, the absurdity of the anti-defection law.

- In what has now become the **standard operating procedure**, several MLAs from the treasury benches resigned, lowering the numbers required for a no-confidence motion to succeed.
- This formula has been seen recently in other States such as Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka.

#### What is the anti-defection law?

The anti-defection law was included in the **Constitution as the Tenth Schedule in 1985** by the 52nd Amendment Act to combat the “**evil of political defections**”.

- **The main purpose was to preserve the stability of governments** and insulate them from defections of legislators from the treasury benches.
- **The law stated that:** any Member of Parliament (MP) or that of a State legislature (MLA) would be disqualified from their office **if they voted on any motion contrary to the directions issued** by their party.

#### Key features of The Tenth Schedule:

- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- **The law applies to both** Parliament and state assemblies.

It describe the conditions under which a member be disqualified. These are:

If a member of a house belonging to a political party-

1. Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or
2. Votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party.
3. However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the **member shall not be disqualified**.
4. If an **independent candidate joins a political party** after the election.
5. If a **nominated member joins a party** after the **six months** of becoming the member of the legislature.

### Exception:

The legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances:

- If a **party to merge with or into another party** provided that **at least two-thirds of its legislators** are in favour of the merger.
- In this case, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.

### Range of the provision:

The provision of anti-defection law was not limited to confidence motions or money bills (which are quasi-confidence motions).

- It applies to all votes in the House, on every Bill and every other issue.
- It even applies to the **Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils**, which have no say in the stability of the government.
- Therefore, an **MP (or MLA) has absolutely no freedom to vote their judgement** on any issue. They have to blindly follow the direction of the party.
- This **provision goes against the concept of representative democracy**.

### Eroding legislatures:

An **important consequence of the anti-defection law** is the hollowing out of our legislatures.

- If an **MP has no freedom to take decisions on policy and legislative proposals**, what would be the incentive to put in the effort to understand the different policy choices and their outcomes?
- The **core role of an MP to examine and decide on policy**, Bills and budgets is side-lined.
- Instead, the **MP becomes just another number to be tallied by the party** on any vote that it supports or opposes.

### Accountability and anti-defection law:

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While introducing the draft Constitution, **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** outlined the differences between the presidential and parliamentary forms of government.

- He said that the **presidential form (such as in the United States)** had **higher stability but lower accountability** as the President is elected for four years, and cannot be removed except for proven misdemeanour.
- **In the parliamentary form**, the **government is accountable** on a daily basis through questions and motions, and can be removed any time it loses the support of the majority of members of the Lok Sabha.
- The drafting committee believed that **India needed a government that was accountable**, even at the cost of stability.

The **anti-defection bill weakens the accountability mechanism.**

## **Inducing instability:**

The anti-defection law does not even provide stability. The political system has found ways to topple governments.

- This includes the methods used in Puducherry this week — **of reducing the total membership through resignations.**
- The **Constitution was amended to ensure** that any **person disqualified for defecting cannot get a ministerial position unless they are re-elected**; the way around this has been to resign rather than vote against the party.
- In other instances, **the Speaker** — usually from the ruling party — **has delayed taking a decision on the disqualification.**
- The **Supreme Court has tried to plug this** by ruling that the **Speaker has to take the decision in three months**, but it is not clear what would happen if a Speaker does not do so.

## **Onus is on parties:**

The problem arises from the attempt **to find a legal solution to what is essentially a political problem.**

- If **stability of government is an issue** due to people defecting from their parties, the answer is for parties to strengthen their internal systems.
- **If they attract members on the basis of ideology**, and they have systems for people to rise within the party hierarchy on their capabilities (rather than inheritance), there would be a greater exit barrier.
- **These characteristics seem absent in many of the political parties**, and we have seen a large number of defections despite the anti-defection law.

## **Conclusion:**

To sum up, the **anti-defection law** has been detrimental to the functioning of our legislatures as **deliberative bodies** which hold the executive to account on behalf of citizens. It has **turned them into fora to endorse the decision of the government** on Bills and budgets.

**EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 27<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY- 2021**

## **WHY ARE THE AGRICULTURE BILLS BEING OPPOSED?**

### **GENERAL STUDIES - III (ISSUES RELATED TO MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICES)**

Three Bills on agriculture reforms were introduced in the Parliament and passed amid din to replace the ordinances issued during the lockdown.

These were:

1. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020;
2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and
3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020

#### **Counteraction on these Bills:**

Farmers and farmer associations across the country have protested against the ordinances. The protest by farmers of Punjab Haryana and UP was started in opposition to these.

The **Punjab Assembly on August 28** passed a resolution rejecting the Centre's ordinances.

#### **Why are the agriculture bills being opposed?**

##### **Cooperative federalism:**

Since **agriculture and markets are State subjects** – entry 14 and 28 respectively in List II – the **ordinances are being seen as a direct encroachment upon the functions of the States** and against the spirit of cooperative federalism enshrined in the Constitution.

The Centre, however, argued that **trade and commerce in food items is part of the concurrent list**, thus giving it constitutional propriety.

##### **End to MSP?**

The **Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance** aims at opening up agricultural sale and marketing outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis for farmers.



- It **removes barriers to inter-State trade** and provides a framework for electronic trading of agricultural produce.
- It **prohibits State governments from collecting market fee, cess or levy for trade** outside the APMC markets.

According to PRS Legislative Research, APMCs were set up with the objective of ensuring fair trade between buyers and sellers for effective price discovery of farmers' produce.

- **APMCs can regulate the trade of farmers' produce** by providing licences to buyers, commission agents, and private markets; levy market fees or any other charges on such trade; and provide necessary infrastructure within their markets to facilitate the trade.
- Framers view the **dismantling of the monopoly of the APMCs as a sign of ending the assured procurement of food grains** at minimum support prices (MSP).
- They argue that **ensuring a larger number of farmers get the MSP** for their produce and straightening kinks in the APMCs, instead of making these State mechanisms redundant is the need of the hour.

### **Framework for contract farming:**

The **Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement** of Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance relates to contract farming, providing a framework on trade agreements for the sale and purchase of farm produce.

The **mutually agreed remunerative price framework** envisaged in the legislation is touted as one that would protect and empower farmers.

### **There are two broader concerns here:**

1. **First**, one principle concern with contract farming has been regarding the negotiating power of the two parties involved.

It seems likely that individual farmers might not find themselves equipped or powerful enough to negotiate with corporates or big-pocket sponsors to ensure a fair price for their produce.

2. **Second**, the Bill says that the quality parameters can be mutually decided by the two parties in the agreement.

But the quality aspect will become crucial when a few corporates will try to usher in uniformity which might end up adversely impacting the already skewed agro-ecological diversity in the country.

### **No mechanism for price fixation:**

- The **Price Assurance Bill**, while offering protection to farmers against price exploitation, does not prescribe the mechanism for price fixation.

- There is **apprehension that the free hand given to private corporate houses** could lead to farmer exploitation.

**Contract farming is not a new concept to the country's farmers** – informal contracts for food grains, formal contracts in sugarcane and poultry sectors are common.

Critics are apprehensive about **formal contractual obligations owing to the unorganised nature of the farm sector and lack of resources for a legal battle** with private corporate entities.

### **Deregulation of food items:**

The **Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance** removes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.

- **The amendment will deregulate** the production, storage, movement and distribution of these food commodities.
- **The central government is allowed regulation of supply during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity**, while providing exemptions for exporters and processors at such times as well.

**The ordinance requires** that imposition of any stock limit on agricultural produce must be based on price rise.

A stock limit may be imposed **only if there is a 100% increase in retail price** of horticultural produce; and a **50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable agricultural food items**, according to PRS.

### **Food security undermined?**

Punjab Chief Minister, on the easing of regulation of food items said, **it would lead to exporters, processors and traders hoarding farm produce during the harvest season**, when prices are generally lower, and releasing it later when prices increase.

- It could undermine food security since the States would have no information about the availability of stocks within the State.
- Critics anticipate **irrational volatility in the prices of essentials and increased black marketing**.

### **General concerns and criticisms:**

- These bills are anti-farmer and will only result in reduced crop prices for farmers and undermine seed security even further.
- Food security will be eroded as government intervention is eliminated.
- These bills promote corporate control of the Indian food and farming systems.
- They will also encourage hoarding and black marketing, in addition to exploitation of farmers.
- The bills also lack any assurance about Minimum Support Price (MSP).



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Test No.	Date	Subject (Code)	Syllabus
1.	01 <sup>st</sup> Mar.	Polity (P1)	Historical Background; Making of the Constitution; Salient features of Indian Constitution; Preamble; Citizenship, Parliamentary and Federal System of Government. Fundamental Rights, DPSP; Fundamental Duties; Amendment to the Constitution; Basic structure of the Constitution, Union & its Territory. Indian Parliament; State Legislature. Emergency Provisions; Constitutional Bodies; Non Constitutional Bodies.
2.	03 <sup>rd</sup> Mar.	Current Affairs (CA1)	CURRENT AFFAIRS FULL LENGTH TEST-1 BASED ON JAN, FEB, MARCH, APRIL (2020).
3.	05 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Economy (E1)	National Income accounting; Income determination (demand-supply curve dynamics); Balance of Payment and Exchange rate determination. Money and Banking. Government budgeting and Fiscal policy; Planning and its changing dynamics.
4.	07 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Modern History (MH1)	Advent of Europeans; Expansion and Establishment of British Paramountcy; The Rule of East India Company. Governor Generals – Related Facts and their Policies; Impact of British Rule in India; Constitutional, Administrative and Judicial Developments 1773 –1858. Tribal and Caste Movements; Socio - Religious and Cultural Reforms in 19 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> century. Revolt of 1857; The Rise and Growth of Indian Nationalism (1858-1885); Indian National Movement: Phase of Moderates and Extremists (1885-1905); Revolutionary Trends in India (1906- 1916).
5.	09 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Geography (G1)	Indian Physiography; Geological structure. Natural Vegetation; Soils; Agriculture. Resources – Energy, Water, Marine, Mineral; Power; Industries; Transport. Climate; Indian Drainage system.
6.	11 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Revision Test (P1 + E1)	Revision Test on Syllabus Covered in P1 (25 <sup>th</sup> Jan) and E1 (1 <sup>st</sup> Feb)
7.	13 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Revision Test (MH1 + G1)	Revision Test on Syllabus Covered in MH1 (5 <sup>th</sup> Feb) and G1 (8 <sup>th</sup> Feb)
8.	15 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Current Affairs (CA2)	CURRENT AFFAIRS FULL LENGTH TEST-2 BASED ON MAY, JUN, JULY, AUGUST (2020).
9.	17 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Polity (P2)	Local Government; Union Territories & Special areas; Union Executive; State Executive Supreme Court; High Court; Subordinate Courts. Special Provisions for some States; Special Provisions relating to certain classes; Cooperative Societies; Official language and Issues. Special Provisions for some States; Special Provisions relating to certain classes; Cooperative Societies; Official language and Issues. Centre State Relations; Inter State Relations; Tribunals; Elections and electoral reforms; Anti Defection Law.
10.	19 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	UPSC-PYQ (POLITY)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from POLITY Section.
11.	21 <sup>st</sup> Mar.	Economy (E2)	Indian Financial markets & commodity exchanges; Foreign investment & foreign trade. Economic reforms; Industry & Infrastructure. Inflation, subsidies and related issues; Agriculture and food management; Land reforms; International economic organizations; Terminologies and associated concepts; Current trends; Poverty, unemployment and rural development; Human development and inclusive growth.
12.	23 <sup>rd</sup> Mar.	UPSC-PYQ (ECONOMY)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from ECONOMY Section.
13.	25 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Modern History (MH2)	Indian National Movement (1) : Gandhian Era (1917- Civil Disobedience Movement-Round Table Conferences - 1947) Development of Indian Press; Development of Education; Movement of the Working Class; Misc.
14.	27 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	UPSC-PYQ (MODERN HISTORY)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from MODERN HISTORY Section.
15.	29 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Geography (G2)	The Universe, solar system, origin and evolution of the earth, earth movements and related aspects, geological time scale, interior of the earth, formation of earth's crust, and atmosphere. Continental drift, seafloor spreading, endogenous and exogenous forces and basics of plate tectonics, supercontinents, seismicity, volcanicity, Tsunami etc. and associated formations. Mountain building, island formations, hotspots etc., rock types and formations, geomorphic processes, ground water, different types of landforms and landscape formation. Climate Types. Insolation, earth's heat balance, different atmospheric circulations - global winds, cyclones, Ocean Currents. Map based Questions
16.	31 <sup>st</sup> Mar.	UPSC-PYQ (GEOGRAPHY)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from GEOGRAPHY Section.
17.	02 <sup>nd</sup> Apr.	Revision Test (P2 + E2 MH2 + G2)	Revision Test on Syllabus Covered in P2 (22 <sup>nd</sup> Feb) + E2 (1 <sup>st</sup> Mar) + MH2 (8 <sup>th</sup> Mar) + G2 (15 <sup>th</sup> Mar)
18.	04 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Current Affairs (CA3)	CURRENT AFFAIRS FULL LENGTH TEST-3 BASED ON SEP., OCT., NOV., DEC. (2020).
19.	06 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Art & Culture (AC)	Indian Architecture and Sculptures; Religion and Philosophy; Promotion and Preservation of Indian Heritage. Indian Music and Dances; Paintings; Puppetry and Theatre; Indian cinema; Indian Languages & Literature; Fairs, Festivals and Art & Craft.
20.	08 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Ancient History (AH)	Pre Historic Age; Indus Valley Civilization; Vedic Era; Jainism and Buddhism. Mauryan and Post Mauryan Empire; Sangam Age; Gupta and Post Gupta Period.
21.	10 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Medieval History (M)	Delhi Sultanate; Vijaynagar and Bahamani Kingdoms; Religious movements Mughal Empire; Maratha Empire; Rise of regional states
22.	12 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	UPSC-PYQ (ART & CULTURE, ANCIENT HISTORY and MEDIEVAL HISTORY)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from ART & CULTURE, ANCIENT HISTORY and MEDIEVAL HISTORY Section.
23.	14 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Science & Tech. (S&T)	Static portion of Science and Technology with special focus on Current Affairs
24.	16 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Environment (Env.)	Ecology and Ecosystem: Basic Concepts & Components; Global warming and Climate Change; Pollution and Environmental issues; Biodiversity; Wildlife Conservation; Sustainable Development; Energy Crisis and Natural Resource conservation; Environmental Monitoring and Impact Assessment; various acts and Laws related to environment; Regulatory Bodies and Policies at national and international level; Intergovernmental Organizations, Treaties and Conventions related to climate change, biodiversity, Agriculture.
25.	18 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	UPSC-PYQ (S&T and ENVIRONMENT)	Full Length Test Based Exclusively on UPSC Previous Year from S&T and ENVIRONMENT Section.
26.	20 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Current Affairs (CA 4)	CURRENT AFFAIRS FULL LENGTH TEST-4 BASED ON JAN, FEB, MARCH, APRIL (2021).
27.	22 <sup>nd</sup> Apr.	Revision Test (AC + AH + M)	Revision Test on Syllabus Covered in AC (29 <sup>th</sup> Mar) + AH (2 <sup>nd</sup> Apr) + M (5 <sup>th</sup> Apr)
28.	24 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Revision Test (S&T + Env.)	Revision Test on Syllabus Covered in S&T (12 <sup>th</sup> Apr) + Env. (16 <sup>th</sup> Apr) Including current Affairs on Science & Tech. and Security
29.	3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Polity Full Length	Full Length Polity (Including Current Affairs on POLITY + IR + SOCIETY)
30.	7 <sup>th</sup> May	History Full Length	Full Length History (Including Current Affairs on GOVERNMENT SCHEMES + ART & CULTURE)
31.	10 <sup>th</sup> May	Geography Full Length	Full Length Geography (Including Current Affairs on ENVIRONMENT + PLACE IN NEWS + ISFR)
32.	14 <sup>th</sup> May	Economy Full Length	Full Length Economy (Including Current Affairs on BUSINESS & ECONOMICS + ECONOMIC SURVEY + BUDGET)
33.	17 <sup>th</sup> May	Current Affairs (CA5)	CURRENT AFFAIRS FULL LENGTH TEST-5 BASED ON JAN-2020 TO MAY-2021
34.	21 <sup>st</sup> May	Full Length (FL1)	Full Length 1 + CSAT - 1
35.	24 <sup>th</sup> May	Full Length (FL2)	Full Length 2 + CSAT - 2
36.	28 <sup>th</sup> May	Full Length (FL3)	Full Length 3 + CSAT - 3
37.	31 <sup>st</sup> May	Full Length (FL4)	Full Length 4 + CSAT - 4
38.	4 <sup>th</sup> June	Full Length (FL5)	Full Length 5 + CSAT - 5
39.	7 <sup>th</sup> June	Full Length (FL6)	Full Length 6 + CSAT - 6
40.	11 <sup>th</sup> June	Full Length (FL7)	Full Length 7 + CSAT - 7



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