

**NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION,
EMPOWERMENT ETC****New panel for welfare of nomadic communities**

The Centre will form a welfare panel for nomadic, semi-nomadic and de-notified communities. A Welfare Development Board will also be set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to design and implement programmes for these hard-to-reach communities.

Key facts:

- The committee will be set up under NITI Aayog to complete the task of identifying de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities.
- The committee will follow up on the work of the Renke Commission and the Idate Commission.

Denotified and Nomadic Tribes:

- The Denotified Tribes are communities that were listed or notified as ‘born criminal’ by the British under a number of laws. The term, ‘Denotified and Nomadic Tribes’, can be traced to the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871.
- The colonial government notified nearly 200 tribal communities to be hereditary criminals, cementing their societal identity as outcasts and subjecting them to constant harassment by the administration.
- Forest laws that came into force from the mid-nineteenth century onwards deprived a large number of communities of their traditional rights of hunting and gathering. The new laws criminalised their very source of livelihood when it practiced.
- When the forests were cleared by the British for commercial use and forest communities asked to contribute to labour, some communities resisted and were declared ‘criminal’.
- The British thought that communities had lost their legitimate means of livelihood, they must have been living by indulging in criminal activities due to arrival of road and railway networks. After India gained Independence, these tribes were ‘de-notified’ from the list of Criminal Tribes.

Idate commission Recommendations:

- Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes are poorest of the poor, most marginalised and most downtrodden communities who are subject to social stigma, atrocity and exclusion. Therefore, the commission has recommended giving protection to Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes the communities under the Atrocities Act.
- The government should provide strong legal protections and constitutional safeguards, including the extension of the Protection of Atrocities Act to the NT/ DNT/ SNT communities by creating a separate Third schedule as Scheduled De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.
- Noting that all that the Centre has done so far are “symbolic reparations”, the Idate Commission advocated for release of 2011 caste census, which is yet to be made public, at least on the DT/ NT/ SNT community, so that policies can be made specifically for these communities.

22nd AIIMS to come up in Haryana

The 22nd AIIMS would come up in Haryana. The announcement was made regarding this at the Interim Budget 2019. The AIIMS would be established at Manethi village in Haryana’s Rewari district.

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) is the autonomous institutions set up under the act of parliament. The All India Institute Of Medical Sciences Act, 1956 provides for the establishment of AIIMS as Institute of National Importance.

Objectives of AIIMS

- To develop a pattern of teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education in all its branches so as to demonstrate a high standard of medical education to all medical colleges and other allied institutions in India.
- To bring together in one place educational facilities of the highest order for the training of the personnel in all important branches of the health activity.

- To attain self-sufficiency in postgraduate medical education.

AIIMS Institutions aims to develop patterns of teaching in Undergraduate and Post-graduate Medical Education in all its branches so as to demonstrate a high standard of Medical Education in India and to bring together in one place educational facilities of the highest order for the training of personnel in all important branches of health activity; and to attain self-sufficiency in Post-graduate Medical Education.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY

Guru Padmasambhava:

An international conference and exhibition of rare artefacts about the life and legacy of 8th century Buddhist sage Guru Padmasambhava is being held in New Delhi. The conference is titled “Life and Legacy of Guru Padmasambhava”. The conference also celebrates the 50 years of diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.

Key facts on Guru Padmasambhava:

- Guru Padmasambhava is known as the Second Buddha because he played a seminal role in spreading Buddhism and Buddhist teachings across the Himalayan region including Northeast India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.
- In Tibetan, Guru Padmasambhava is generally referred to as Guru Rinpoche, which means “precious master.”
- He undertook many travels across India, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal.
- Thangka paintings, sculptures and photographs portray the life and teachings of the Guru.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMS, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.

Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana

Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana was announced in the interim budget 2019-20.

Key facts:

- It is a scheme for the unorganised sector workers with monthly income upto Rs 15,000. A sum of Rs 500 crore has been allocated for the Scheme.
- This scheme shall provide an assured monthly pension of Rs 3,000 from the age of 60 years on a monthly contribution of a small affordable amount during their working age.
- An unorganised sector worker joining pension yojana at the age of 29 years will have to contribute only Rs 100 per month till the age of 60 years. A worker joining the pension yojana at 18 years, will have to contribute as little as Rs 55 per month only.
- The Government will deposit equal matching share in the pension account of the worker every month.

Need and Significance of the scheme:

- It is expected that at least 10 crore labourers and workers in the unorganised sector will avail the benefit of the scheme within next five years making it one of the largest pension schemes of the world.
- Half of India’s GDP comes from the sweat and toil of 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector working as street vendors, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, rag pickers, agricultural workers, beedi workers, handloom, leather and in numerous other similar occupations. The Government must provide them comprehensive social security coverage for their old age.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

INSTEX – Instrument In Support Of Trade Exchanges

INSTEX is a payment mechanism being setup by the European Union to secure trade with Iran and skirt US sanctions after Washington pulled out of the landmark nuclear deal last May.

Key features of INSTEX:

- INSTEX will allow trade between the EU and Iran without relying on direct financial transactions.
- INSTEX is registered at Paris with an initial 3,000 Euros in the capital and a supervisory board with members from France and Germany and chaired by the UK.

- It is a project of the governments of France, Germany and Britain and will receive the formal endorsement of all 28 EU members.
- It will initially be used for non-sanctionable trade, including humanitarian goods such as medicine, food and medical devices.

Significance:

- This mechanism is the first concrete step by the EU to counter Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal.
- The launching of INSTEX is not only a matter of Iran-EU relations but also embodies a new approach by the bloc towards US policies. It "becomes an opportunity when it's understood as an experiment and as part of a bigger project to strengthen EU economic power.

However, the USA has warned EU that any attempt to evade its "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran would be subject to stiff penalties.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

The U.S is suspending its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and will withdraw from the treaty in six months.

Background:

US in early December announced that it would suspend its obligations under the INF treaty by Feb. 2, citing Russian "cheating," unless Moscow comes into compliance with the terms of the pact. The U.S. government says the new Russian missile violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,400 miles.

Implications:

- It is unclear what INF-prohibited systems the United States could deploy to Europe or Asia in the near term. The U.S. military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729.
- Moscow is in a very different position and could rapidly expand deployment. The number of operational 9M729 missiles has been quite limited, but released from its official obligations under the treaty, Moscow could deploy more units rapidly.
- Russia could also effectively reclassify the RS-26 Rubezh, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty's 5,500-kilometer limit. To avoid violating the INF, Russian officials previously described the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it could form the basis for a missile of a slightly shorter range if Moscow wished to boost its INF forces — without counting it under the U.S.-Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, governing longer-range systems.
- This move is also likely to undermine the 2010 New START treaty governing U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear systems. The INF Treaty's demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty:

- The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty, formally Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles) is a 1987 arms control agreement.
- Under the INF Treaty, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed to eliminate within three years all ground-launched-missiles of 500-5,500 km range and not to develop, produce or deploy these in future.
- The U.S. destroyed 846 Pershing IIs and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) and the U.S.S.R., 1,846 missiles (SS-4s, SS-5s and SS-20s), along with its support facilities.

Importance of the Treaty in U.S.-Russia relations:

- Under the Treaty, the two parties agreed that a whole important class of nuclear weapons would be removed from Europe, and only tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) or short-range missiles mostly deployed on the territory of Germany would remain.
- The INF Treaty for years served to mitigate fears of both parties in relation to possibility of military escalation, operational miscalculation, and helping to shift the logic of MAD [mutually assured destruction] to the higher "more sensitive" political level.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Indian Foreign Exchange Reserves**

The RBI data shows that Indian Foreign Exchange Reserves have been increased by USD 1.497 billion to reach USD 398.178 billion. This increase has been attributed to a jump in core currency assets.

Trends in Indian Foreign Exchange Reserves

India's Foreign Exchange Reserves fluctuations in recent times:

- In the week previous to January 25, the foreign exchange reserves had dropped by USD 671 million to USD 396.68 billion.
- The foreign exchange reserves of India had touched a record high of USD 426.028 billion in the week to April 13, 2018. Since then it is mostly declining.
- The decline is largely attributed to the selling of the dollar by the RBI to contain rupee volatility.
- The central bank now holds 566.23 tonnes of the gold and purchase of 8.46 metric tonnes of gold was made in the fiscal year ending June 2018.
- In its annual Report, RBI had stated that the purchase of gold was made to diversify the foreign currency assets.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Foreign Exchange Reserves are the reserve assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies. They are used to back liabilities on their own issued currency as well as to influence monetary policy. These reserves act as a buffer during the challenging times to the economy.

The components of India's FOREX Reserves which is expressed in terms of US dollars include foreign currency assets (FCAs), Gold Reserves, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and RBI's Reserve position with International Monetary Fund (IMF). FCAs constitute the largest component of Indian Forex.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**World Wetlands Day**

World Wetlands Day was celebrated on February 2nd with the theme of "Wetlands and Climate Change". The theme signifies the importance of healthy and intact wetlands to one of the most pressing challenges of our times, climate change. The theme has been chosen to initiate action against the drainage of wetlands. The theme Wetlands and Climate Change is aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of wetlands, such as swamps, marshes, mangroves or peatlands, to help us cope with and mitigate global warming.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on 2 February 1971 to commemorate the signing of the Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention at the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The two-fold objectives of the Ramsar Convention are Conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands and stop the encroachment and loss of wetlands.

Significance of Wetlands

- Almost 90% of disasters are water-related and affects 60% of humanity that lives along coastlines affected by flooding and tsunamis. Wetlands are key to climate change mitigation.
- Wetlands function as a natural and extremely efficient carbon sink. For Example, wetlands which cover only 3% of land mass, absorb and store twice the amount of carbon as all the world's forests combined.
- Wetlands act as a buffer for climate catastrophes that help communities be resilient against the immediate impacts of climate change.