

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Child Marriage**

The Supreme Court has held in a recent judgment that the anti-child marriage law does not intend to punish a male aged between 18 and 21 years for marrying a “female adult.”

About:

- The supreme court interpreted Section 9 of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, which says: “whoever, being a male adult above 18 years of age, contracts a child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or with both.”
- The court said neither does the provision punish a child for marrying a woman nor a woman for marrying a male child because decisions regarding marriage are usually taken by the family members of the bride and groom, and women generally have little say in the matter.
- It said the 2006 Act also gives an option for prospective grooms who are between 18 and 21 years old to opt out of marriages.

Poshan Abhiyaan

According to an analysis of the data shared in Parliament, The State governments/UTs have utilised a mere 30% of the funds released under the Poshan Abhiyaan, or the National Nutrition Mission, since it was launched in 2017.

About:

- Barring Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar, none of the governments used even half of the sum granted in the past three years.
- The five best performers in terms of fund utilisation were Mizoram (65.12%), Lakshadweep (61.08%), Bihar (55.17%), Himachal Pradesh (53.29%) and Meghalaya (48.37%).
- The worst five performers were Punjab (0.45%), Karnataka (0.74%), Kerala (8.75%), Jharkhand (13.94%) and Assam (23.01%).

Poshan Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission):

- The Poshan Abhiyaan, the Centre’s flagship programme, is aimed at improving nutritional outcomes among pregnant women, lactating mothers and children by reducing the level of stunting, underweight, anaemia and low birth weight by 2022.
- It is meant to benefit more than 10 crore people.
- It was launched in 2018 with a total budget of Rs. 9,046.17 crore for three years.
- 50% of which is through budgetary support, which is further divided into 60:40 between the Centre and the States, 90:10 for the north-eastern region and the Himalayan States and 100% for the Union Territories without legislature.
- The remaining 50% is from the World Bank or other multilateral development banks. As a result, the Centre’s total share will be Rs. 2,849.54 crore.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**Belum Caves**

The Belum Caves Festival in Andhra Pradesh, which was to be organised in December 2019 will now be held this month (January 2020) to highlight the importance of the Balum Caves.

About:

- Location: The Belum Caves are located near Belum Village in Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh.
- Size: It is the second largest caves on the Indian Subcontinent after the Krem Liat Prah caves in Meghalaya.
- Features: This cave system is known for its speleothems, such as stalactite and stalagmite formations. It has long passages, galleries, spacious caverns with fresh water and siphons. The caves consist of black limestone.
- Formation: This cave system was formed over the course of tens of thousands of years by the constant flow of underground water from the now-disappeared river Chitravathi.

Lai Haraoba

Lai Haraoba, a ritualistic festival began in Agartala, Tripura.

About:

- Lai Haraoba is a ritualistic festival observed by Manipuri meitei communities since ancient times.
- Lai Haraoba is celebrated through oral literature, music, dance and rituals. Cultural troupes will be performing various cultural and traditional musical skits including Manipuri martial arts, folk music and folk dances during the festival.
- The five day long festival is jointly organised by Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Government of Tripura, Puthiba Lai Haraoba Committee and Puthiba Welfare & Cultural Society, Agartala.

Atola Saree

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), inaugurated the first Silk Processing Plant at Surendranagar in Gujarat which would increase the sale and availability of raw material for Gujarati Patola Sarees locally.

About:

- Patola, the trademark Saree of Gujarat, is considered to be very costly and worn only by the Royals or the Aristocrat.
- Reason being the raw material silk yarn is purchased from Karnataka or West Bengal, where silk processing units are situated, thus increasing the cost of the fabric manifolds.
- Now, cocoons will be brought from Karnataka and West Bengal and Silk yarn will be processed in house, thus reducing the cost of production and giving a major boost to the sale of famous Gujarati Patola Sarees.

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC**Northeast (Winter) Monsoon**

The IMD says India has just finished a satisfactory northeast monsoon. The northeast, or winter, monsoon has ended on a high, with an overall surplus rainfall being recorded for the season.

About:

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recognises October to December as the time for the northeast monsoon.
- The northeast monsoon does not have anything to do with India's Northeast, even though a part of the system does originate from the area above it. Rather, it derives its name from the direction in which it travels — from the northeast to the southwest.
- The northeast monsoon brings rain to just five of the 36 meteorological divisions in the country — Tamil Nadu (which includes Puducherry), Kerala, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema and South Interior Karnataka.
- This season contributes only 11 per cent to India's annual rainfall of 1,187 mm, compared to about 75 per cent in the summer monsoon season (the remaining rain comes in other non-monsoon months).

Related Info: The year that just went by witnessed the rare meteorological coincidence of the northeast (winter) monsoon making its onset on the same day as the southwest monsoon withdrew officially. The two events rarely happen simultaneously.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Abetment Of Suicide**

The Supreme Court has held in a judgment that a person accused of dowry harassment cannot be automatically convicted for abetment of suicide.

About:

- Merely because an accused is found guilty of an offence punishable under Section 498A of the IPC, the accused cannot be automatically held guilty for the offence punishable under Section 306 (abetment of suicide) of the IPC by employing the presumption under Section 113A of the Evidence Act.
- Unless the prosecution establishes that some act or illegal omission by the accused has driven the deceased to commit the suicide, the conviction under Section 306 would not be tenable.

Section 306 of the Indian penal code, 1860:

- Abetment of suicide is an offence under section 306 of the Indian penal code, 1860.
- According to the 306 section of the Indian Penal Code, a person abetting the suicide of another person shall be punished with imprisonment up to 10 years and shall also be liable to fine.
- Abetting a suicide is a non-bailable charge.
- A person is guilty of abetment when:
 - He instigates someone to commit suicide (or)
 - He is part of a conspiracy to make a person commit suicide (or)
 - He intentionally helps the victim to commit suicide by doing an act or by not doing something that he was bound to do.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**Year End Review: Ministry of Tourism**

Government is committed to make policies and programmes for the development and promotion of tourism and the year 2019 witnessed several steps in this direction.

About:

- In the year 2019, India's rank in Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of World Economic Forum has moved to 34th position from 65th rank in 2013.

- Foreign Tourist Arrivals also registered a growth of 3.2 percent last year.
- The government is working to develop thematic circuits under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and 77 projects amounting over Rs 6035 crore have been sanctioned till date under this scheme.
- An initiative called - 'Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan' has been launched for developing tourist amenities at heritage and tourist sites and making them tourist-friendly.
- E-visa has been further liberalized and visa fee on e - visa has been substantially reduced to increase tourism competitiveness of the country.
- The Government has also opened more than 120 mountain peaks for mountaineering and trekking for promoting adventure tourism in the country.

Swarna Jayanti Fellowships

Swarna Jayanti Fellowships for 2018-19 have been awarded to 14 Scientists associated with projects containing innovative research idea and with potential of making impact on R&D in the respective disciplines.

About:

- The Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme was instituted by Government of India to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence.
- The awardees are supported by Department of Science & Technology, for fellowship and research.
- This will cover all the requirements for performing the research and include a fellowship of Rs 25,000/- per month as well as a research grant of 5 lakh Rupees for 5 years in addition to their salary.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Indo-Pak Prisoners List

India and Pakistan exchanged the lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen of each country lodged in jails through diplomatic channels. This is in keeping with the provisions of the 2008 Agreement.

About:

- Under the Agreement on consular access between the Government of Pakistan and India. 2008, the two countries to exchange "list of the nationals – Civilian prisoners and fishermen – of the other country under its arrest/detention" on January 1 and July 1 each year.
- The exchange of lists comes despite continued military tension, which has, however, not dampened humanitarian moves by both sides.
- India handed over lists of 267 Pakistan civilian prisoners and 99 fishermen to Pakistan who are in India's custody. Similarly, Pakistan has shared lists of 55 civilian prisoners and 227 fishermen in its custody, who are Indians or believed-to-be Indians.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vistadome Coaches

Indian Railways unveiled Him Darshan Express comprising all-new Vistadome coaches from Kalka railway station to Shimla.

Him Darshan Express:

- Commuters travelling in Him Darshan Express will enjoy the beautiful scenic view of the Himalayas as the train will have Vistadome AC coaches with glass roof.
- This special train will commute between the Kalka and Shimla station for the next one year till December 24, 2020. This is a first-of-its-kind train on the Kalka-Shimla route.
- Him Darshan Express will be the first-ever train with Vistadome coaches by the Indian Railways that will run on a regular basis.

Vistadome coach:

- Vistadome Coach consists of a glass roof which has electrically controlled opalescence, that is, it can be made transparent or opaque at the turn of a switch.
- The first Vistadome Coach was commissioned by the Ministry of Railways on the Vishakhapatnam – Araku Valley Route in April, 2017.

Arogya Sanjeevani Policy

Insurance regulator, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) issued guidelines on standard individual health insurance, asking insurers to cover basic health needs.

About:

- Under the guidelines, IRDAI asked the general and health insurers to offer product that can take care of basic health needs of customers with maximum sum insured of Rs 5 lakh and a minimum of Rs 1 lakh.
- The product will be named as Arogya Sanjeevani Policy, succeeded by the name of the insurance company. No other name is allowed in any of the documents.

- The standard product should have the basic mandatory covers, no add-ons or optional covers are allowed to be offered along with the standard product and the insurer may determine the price keeping in view the covers proposed to be offered subject to complying with guidelines.
- The standard product shall be offered on indemnity basis only and the policy tenure shall be for a period of one year.

Restructuring Of Railways

The government has decided to trim the Railway Board, and merge service cadres.

Railway Board:

- The Cabinet recently approved trimming of the Railway Board, the powerful body that governs the Indian Railways. From nine, the Board will now have only five Members.
- The five members of the Board, other than a Chairman-cum-CEO, will now be the Members Infrastructure, Finance, Rolling Stock, Track, and Operations and Business Development.
- The Board will also have independent Members, who will be industry experts with at least 30 years of experience, but in non-executive roles, only attending Board meetings.

Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS):

- The Cabinet also decided to merge all central service cadres of Railways officers into a single Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS).
- Now, any eligible officer could occupy any post, including Board Member posts, irrespective of training and specialisation, since they will all belong to IRMS.
- The move has led to protests from serving civil servants, prompting the Railway Board to reach out to them to allay their concerns.

Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI)

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched a mobile app, Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI) to help visually challenged people to identify denomination of currency notes.

About:

- RBI said that the visually challenged can identify the denomination of a note by using the application, which can also work offline once it is installed.
- Through the downloaded app, users can scan the notes using the camera. The audio output will give the result in Hindi and English.
- The app is available both on Android and iOS operating systems.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Forest Fires

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) released the 2019 report on Forest Fires. It is based on a study carried out by the FSI along forest fire points identified across the country from 2004 to 2017.

Key Findings:

- About 21.4% of forest cover in India is prone to fires, with forests in the north-eastern region and central India being the most vulnerable.
- Extremely fire prone areas account for 3.89% of total forest cover, very highly fire prone areas account for 6.01% and highly fire prone areas for 11.50%. Together, the three categories come to 21.40 % of forest cover.
- Central Indian States also recorded a high number of forest fire alerts, with Madhya Pradesh accounting for 2,723 alerts; Maharashtra 2,516; Odisha 2,213 and Chattisgarh 1,008 alerts between November 2018 to June 2019.

Reasons:

- The reasons for fires here are manmade, particularly in cases where people visit forests and leave burning bidis, cigarette stubs or other inflammable materials.
- In cases of natural reasons, the scientist pointed to thunderstorms as the most likely cause.
- One of the major reasons for forest fires in the north-east is slash-and-burn cultivation, commonly called jhoom or jhum cultivation. The fires happen between the months of January and March.

Related Info: The north-east has tropical evergreen forests and, unlike the dry deciduous forests of central India, these are not likely to catch fire easily.

Senna Spectabilis

The Kerala Forest department is taking comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like 'Senna Spectabilis', in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary.

About:

- Senna spectabilis is a plant species of the legume family (Fabaceae) in the subfamily Caesalpinioideae native to South and Central America.

- They are often grown as an ornamental in front yards, parks, gardens, buildings etc. due to their bright yellow flowers that bloom during the summer months.
- They are also known as Golden wonder tree, American cassia, Popcorn tree, Cassia excelsa, Golden shower tree or Archibald's cassia.
- The plant has become an invasive alien specie in parts of Africa and South Asia after it was introduced for resources such as firewood as well as to help combat deteriorating ecosystems affected by deforestation and desertification.
- Currently, *S. spectabilis* is overtaking native tree species of forestry ecosystems around the world because of its ability to grow quickly.

Greater Adjutant Stork

The Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden and Aaranyak has jointly attained a landmark achievement by successfully hatching a pair of Greater Adjutant chicks in an artificial platform within the zoo enclosure, in the first ever experiment of its kind in the country.

About:

- The Endangered Greater Adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) is one of the rarest species of Storks out of twenty species of Storks in the world.
- In India, eight species of residential storks are found, out of which Greater Adjutant is one of them. Once abundantly distributed in Southeast Asia, this stork is now restricted to a few isolated pockets in Assam and Bihar in India and PrekToal in Cambodia.
- This colonial birds breeds in traditional nesting colonies within thickly populated villages in Assam and breeds in tall trees species.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

E-Cigarette Or Vaping Product Use-Associated Lung Injury (Evali)

As of December 2019 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a US federal agency, has reported 2,561 cases across the country who have suffered EVALI, the mysterious respiratory illness linked to vaping and e-cigarettes.

About:

- EVALI is the name given by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the dangerous, newly identified lung disease linked to vaping.
- The name EVALI is an acronym that stands for e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury.
- The illness was first recognized by the CDC in August 2019 after health department officials across the country began to work together to study cases of severe, sometimes fatal, lung infections that arose suddenly in otherwise healthy individuals.
- It's therefore unclear how the condition develops or why, in the most severe and life-threatening cases, it causes the lungs to stop functioning altogether.
- CDC urge everyone to avoid e-cigarette or vaping products that contain tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC (a high-inducing chemical derived from marijuana).

Dornier 228 Aircraft

The Chief of the Air Staff formally inducted the Flight Inspection system (FIS) Dornier 228 aircraft into No 41 Squadron, the 'Otters.'

About:

- The Dornier-228 aircraft is a multi-purpose, fuel efficient, rugged, light weight twin turboprop aircraft with a retractable tricycle landing gear. The aircraft's cockpit is designed to accommodate two crew members and is fitted with duplicate controls.
- The modified Dornier 228 aircraft have been acquired to undertake in-house calibration of Navigational aids available after implementation of Modernised Airfield Infrastructure (MAFI) at IAF bases.

Background:

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2015 had signed a contract to purchase 14 Dornier aircraft, which are flight inspection system planes, from state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- While the first aircraft was delivered in November 2019, the second is expected to be delivered in early 2020.
- This aircraft has been exported to Seychelles and Mauritius.

Thoothukodi Launch Port

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will establish a second launch port in Thoothukodi district in Tamil Nadu exclusively to launch Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLVs).

Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):

- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is a launch vehicle being developed by the ISRO with payload capacity to deliver 500 kg to Low Earth orbit or 300 kg to Sun synchronous orbit for launching small satellites, with the capability to support multiple orbital drop-offs.
- In December 2018, the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thumba completed the design for the vehicle. The maiden flight is expected in early 2020.
- After entering the operational phase, the vehicle's production and launch operations will be done by a consortium of Indian firms along with New Space India Limited.

Regulatory Framework For Cable & Broadcasting Services

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has made amendments to the new regulatory framework for cable and broadcasting services with a view to protect the consumer interests.

About:

- Under it, cable TV users will be able to access more channels at lower subscription price. Consumers had earlier highlighted huge charges taken by Distribution Platform Operators (DPOs) in the form of Network Capacity Fee -NCF for a multi-TV home.
- TRAI has capped at 160 rupees the amount consumers will have to pay monthly for all free to air channels.
- In the homes where more than one TV connection is working in the name of one person, it will charge maximum 40 per cent of declared NCF for second and additional TV connections.
- TRAI has permitted DPOs to offer discounts on long term subions which is for 6 months or more.
- It has also reduced the maximum NCF charge to 130 rupees excluding taxes for 200 channels. UIt has also been decided that channels declared mandatory by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will not be counted in the number of channels in the NCF.
- Only those channels which have an MRP of 12 rupees or less will be permitted to be part of the bouquet offered by broadcasters.

Aditya-L1

In his 'Mann ki Baat' programme of AIR, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that ISRO is planning to launch a satellite called Aditya to study the sun.

About:

- Objective: The probe named Aditya-L1 will be sent by PSLV-XL from Sriharikota to observe the solar corona, the outer layers of the Sun.
- Its main payload is Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) which will study the diagnostic parameters of solar corona and dynamics and origin of Coronal Mass Ejections (3 visible and 1 Infra-Red channels).
- Features: It will be inserted in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system, which is 1.5 million km from the Earth.

Significance of Mission:

- A Satellite placed in the halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system has the major advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any eclipses.
- Only NASA and ESA have successfully placed satellites at the L1 point as of date.
- This will be the first Indian space mission to study the Sun.
- It will be India's third big extra-terrestrial outing after Moon and Mars.

Lagrange Points:

- A Lagrange point is a location in space where the combined gravitational forces of two large bodies, such as Earth and the sun or Earth and the moon, equal the centrifugal force felt by a much smaller third body.
- The interaction of the forces creates a point of equilibrium where a spacecraft may be "parked" to make observations. These points are named after Joseph-Louis Lagrange, an 18th-century mathematician.

Structure of Lagrange points in sun-earth system:

- There are five such points, labeled L1 to L5, all in the orbital plane of the two large bodies. The first three are on the line connecting the two large bodies; the last two, L4 and L5, each form an equilateral triangle with the two large bodies.
- The two latter points are stable, which implies that objects can orbit around them in a rotating coordinate system tied to the two large bodies.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY**Indian Railway Protection Force Service**

According to an order recently issued, the Railways renamed the Railway Protection Force (RPF) as Indian Railway Protection Force Service and accorded it organised Group A status (OGAS).

About:

- Grant of status of Organized Group 'A' service to RPF will end stagnation, improve career progression of the officers and keep up their motivational level.
- In 2012, High Court of Delhi directed Railways to grant Group 'A' Service status to RPF. Same was upheld by Supreme Court of India in 2019. Accordingly, Railway Board had proposed for grant of Organised Group 'A' Service status to RPF.

Background:

- The Railway Security Force (RSF) was established in the Railway Protection Force Act, 1957 renamed RSF to Railway Protection Force (RPF) and expanded the force's legal powers (thus it's a statutory body).
- Status: In 1980s it was transformed into an 'Armed Force of the Union' by giving enhanced powers.
- Functions: It has the primary duty of protection of railway property, passenger area, and passengers. RPF is NOT responsible for ALL aspects of railways security as it shares its duties with the Government Railway Police (GRP) and the District Police.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC**World Braille Day**

The world Braille Day was celebrated on January 4, 2020. The day is marked to remember the birth anniversary of Louis Braille, the inventor of Braille - for people with visual disabilities.

About:

- World Braille Day, celebrated since 2019, is observed to raise awareness of the importance of Braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for blind and partially sighted people.
- Braille is a system that enables blind and visually impaired people to read and write through
- Braille is named after its creator, Louis Braille, a Frenchman who lost his sight as a result of a childhood accident. It was devised by Louis Braille in 1821
- The Braille Script consists of raised dots arranged in "cells." A cell is made up of six dots that fit under the fingertips, arranged in two columns of three dots each. Each cell represents a letter, a word, a combination of letters, a numeral or a punctuation mark.
- Braille is essential in the context of education, freedom of expression and opinion, as well as social inclusion, as reflected in article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the '107th Indian Science Congress', which is being held from January 3 to 7, 2020.

About:

- It is a premier scientific organisation of India having a membership of more than 30,000 scientists.
- Headquarters: Kolkata, West Bengal.
- Origin: The association started in the year 1914 at the initiative of two British chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P. S. MacMahon.
- Meeting: It meets annually, generally in the first week of January.
- Objectives:
 - The Association was formed with the following objectives –
 - To advance and promote the cause of science in India.
 - To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India.
 - To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
 - To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science.

107th session of ISC:

- Theme: 'Science & Technology: Rural Development'.
- Venue: University of Agricultural Sciences (UASB), GKVK Campus, Bangalore, Karnataka.
- A Farmers Science Congress is being held for the first time in the history of Indian Science Congress. It will be attended by agricultural experts and farmers whose innovative approaches have led to significant contributions.
- Vigyan Sancharak Sammelan (Science Communicators Meet) is an initiative for Science communicators' for professional growth.
- The Women's Science Congress aims to provide single platform for women working in different arena of science and technology to showcase their achievements and experiences.
- Rashtriya Kishore Vaigyanik Sammelan (Children's Science Congress) will be held to provide a unique opportunity for children to view selected projects and interact with eminent scientists and Nobel Laureates.

- Pride Of India ISC Expo is a Mega Science Exhibition which is a unique platform for organizations from government, private and public sector to showcase their achievements in the field of science and technology.

ODISHA DEVELOPMENT

Dhanu Jatra

The famous 11-day long 'Dhanu Jatra', considered as the largest open-air theatre of the world began at Bargarh in Odisha.

About:

- Dhanu Jatra is the annual drama-based open-air theatrical performance celebrated in and around Bargarh city.
- It is considered to be the world's largest open-air theatrical festival that finds a mention in the Guinness Book of World Records.
- The annual festival came into being in 1947-48 to celebrate Indian's Independence and to symbolize the victory of good over evil.
- The department of Culture of the Government of India has accorded National Festival status to Dhanu Jatra in November 2014.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. What do you understand by agrobiodiversity? Examine its significance in light of climate change, sustainable agriculture and poverty.

Ans:

Agrobiodiversity (agricultural + biological + diversity) refers to the full range of diversity of life present in agricultural settings, from mammals to microbes and everything in between. The concept of agrobiodiversity has been put forth as a way to incorporate aspects of natural settings into agriculturally productive systems.

Need for preserving agrobiodiversity

- Environmental pollution has caused loss of diversity in natural ecosystems
- Use of chemical fertilizers, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has created an imbalance in biogeochemical cycles.
- Billions of people live in poverty who are relatively more dependent on natural ecosystems and agriculture.

Sustainable Agriculture

- Crop rotation is a relatively simpler way to maintain high levels of agrobiodiversity. Intercropping is another. Agrobiodiversity increases productivity, makes farming systems more stable, robust, and sustainable.
- Reduces the pressure of agriculture on fragile areas, forests and endangered species.
- Increases food security, and economic returns.
- Contributes to sound pest and disease management.
- Conserves soil and increase natural soil fertility and health.
- Reduces dependency on external inputs..
- Conserves ecosystem structure and stability of species diversity.

Combating Poverty

- Agrobiodiversity can help in nutrition-sensitive farming and bio-fortified foods.
- Provides sources of medicines and vitamins.
- This diversity can be leveraged to provide nutritious, affordable, locally available food to vulnerable and poor communities. India can achieve SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.
- Climate Change
- Use of chemicals in agriculture contributes to emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) during manufacturing.
- Agrobiodiversity would help in reducing vulnerability to extreme weather conditions by enhancing adaptability, resilience through restoration of traditional systems of food production, collection and water harvesting. It can result in the revival of traditional practices which are locally best suited. It can also result in new practices which can enhance adaptability and resilience.
- For Ex. in Rajasthan, the efforts of local communities resulted in revival of traditional methods of water harvesting and Avari river.

Challenges to Agrobiodiversity

- Loss of crop genetic resources due to adopting new crop varieties without conserving traditional varieties.

- Similarly, Crossbreeding of foreign breeds with indigenous breeds leads to erosion of genetically diverse pool.
- About 7,000 plant species have historically been used in human diets. But, today only 30 crops form the basis of the world's agriculture.

Conclusion: There is a need for preserving agrobiodiversity in the backdrop of climate change, poverty and related challenges to humanity. Ecologically sensitive farming which can be done by conserving crop wild relatives of cereals, millets, oilseeds, fruits/vegetables, etc is the need of the hour. Incentives should be provided to farmers cultivating native varieties and those conserving indigenous breeds of livestock and poultry varieties. Community seed banks should be encouraged in each agro-climatic zone. India should also have a national policy on invasive alien species to control and eradicate invasive species.

Qns: Examine the need of Chief of Defence Staff for India's National Security.

The need for a unified command was made apparent following the 1962 war against China and the 1965 war with Pakistan. The turning point came with the formation of Kargil Review Committee, which was formed after the Kargil War to review the events leading up to the war and offer recommendations for the future. The report, led by K. Subrahmanyam, highlighted several shortcomings that stemmed from a lack of coordination between services.

Recently, Indian govt has officially created the post of the Chief of Defense Staff for further coordination among 3 services of Indian Armed Forces.

Argument in favor of CDS

Some experts are favouring this concept on the basis of following arguments. These are:

- The case for a CDS has been built around the argument that it is necessary to have a professional body of the highest standing to facilitate 'jointmanship' and render single-point military advice to the government on matters of national security.
- The institution of a CDS is best justified by the importance of strategising for a robust and costefficient national defence policy. Implicit in this is the role the CDS would play in fostering interservices jointness in terms of budgeting, equipment purchases, training, joint doctrines and planning of military operations- an imperative of modern warfare.
- Probably, India is the only country in the world, where the Secretary Department of Defence - a generalist civil servant drawn from diverse background and who serves in the MoD for a fixed tenure - has been made responsible for the Defence of India and every part thereof including preparation for defence. It means that a bureaucrat heading the Defence Ministry will formulate the operational plans for war fighting and Chiefs of Staff will execute it.
- The creation of the post of CDS will make our national security more effective and more economical.
- Structural reforms could bring about a much closer and more constructive interaction between the civil government and the services. The merger will enable better long-term defence planning covering missions, training, logistics, acquisitions, operational strategy, force structure and personnel management.
- From an operational perspective, the concept of military conflict today extends beyond land, air and sea, into the domains of space, cyber, electronic and information. Effective defence preparedness requires a 'jointness' of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Indian Navy in incorporating these domains into their warfighting strategies. It also requires a prioritisation of the weapons requirements of the forces and optimisation of their resource allocations based on a clearly defined national defence strategy.
- The CDS is also seen as being vital to the creation of "theatre commands", integrating tri-service assets and personnel like in the United States (US) military. India has 17 service commands at different locations and duplicating assets.
- Another fear that a CDS will erode the supremacy of the civil over the military is unfounded. The CDS will not be a Supreme Commander. He will only be an Inter-Service professional coordinator with individual service chiefs having the right of direct access to the head of the government. It also needs to be mentioned that Army Chiefs in different countries have staged military coups but no CDS has ever done so. India's Defence Services are fully committed to upholding democratic values and in a well-established democracy like ours with such diversity, and of continental dimension, the question of a military coup does not arise.

Arguments against CDS

- Theoretically, the appointment of a CDS is long overdue, but there appears to be no clear blueprint for the office to ensure its effectiveness. India's political establishment is seen as being largely ignorant of, or at best indifferent towards, security matters, and hence incapable of ensuring that a CDS works. The several arguments has been discussed below:

- It is apprehended that the defence services will become too powerful and subvert civilian control over the military with the possibility of military coup.
- There is feeling among the smaller services, particularly the Air Force, of Army dominance in defence policy formulation. Some fear that a CDS may lead to a situation like the one that prevailed before 1947, when the Army was the dominant service.
- Many serving service chiefs are inhibited by the idea of CDS as they think that their position would be undermined if the CDS would be appointed.
- The Indian Air Force has long argued that unlike the US and other Western militaries, the Indian services are not an expeditionary force, for which a CDS is a necessity. This is because fighting a war on alien soil need the combined firepower of all the three services.

Way Forward

- In his announcement on the CDS, the Prime Minister mentioned past reports on defence reforms, the transforming nature of military conflict, the impact of technology and the need for modernisation, coordination and jointness. This leads to hope that the GoM recommendations of 2001 along with latest Committee of experts report will be implemented. If carried out objectively, it will better enable India's civilian managers including MoD bureaucrats to understand operational issues and the consequences of their choices in tackling the military challenges posed by hostile countries especially China and Pakistan. At last, creation of the post of CDS will bring greater efficiency, transparency and accountability into decision-making on defence matters.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

- With reference to the Aditya-L1, consider the following statements:
 - It will be sent by PSLV-XL from Sriharikota to observe the solar corona, the outer layers of the Sun.
 - It will be inserted in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system, which is 1.5 million km from the Earth.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the Poshan Abhiyaan, or the National Nutrition Mission, consider the following statements:
 - It is aimed at improving nutritional outcomes among pregnant women, lactating mothers and children by reducing the level of stunting, underweight, anaemia and low birth weight by 2022.
 - The 50% of funding is from the World Bank or other multilateral development banks.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI, a mobile app to help visually challenged people to identify denomination of currency notes is launched by:
 - Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**
 - Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)
 - Union Ministry of Finance
 - NITI Aayog
- With reference to the regulatory framework for cable and broadcasting services, consider the following statements:
 - TRAI has capped at 160 rupees the amount consumers will have to pay monthly for all free to air channels.
 - Only those channels which have an MRP of 12 rupees or less will be permitted to be part of the bouquet offered by broadcasters.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), consider the following statements:
 - Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will establish a second launch port in Kochi exclusively to launch small satellite launch vehicles (SSLVs).
 - The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is a launch vehicle being developed by the ISRO with payload capacity to deliver 500 kg to Low Earth orbit or 300 kg to Sun synchronous orbit for launching small satellites, with the capability to support multiple orbital drop-offs.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only

- (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. With reference to the India and Pakistan prisoners list, consider the following statements:
- Under the Agreement on consular access between the Government of Pakistan and India, 2008, the two countries to exchange “list of the nationals – Civilian prisoners and fishermen – of the other country under its arrest/detention” on January 1 and July 1 each year.
 - The exchange of lists comes despite continued military tension, which has, however, not dampened humanitarian moves by both sides.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. With reference to the Swarna Jayanti Fellowships for 2018-19, consider the following statements:
- The Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme was instituted by Government of India to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence.
 - It will cover all the requirements for performing the research and include a fellowship of Rs 25,000/- per month as well as a research grant of 5 lakh Rupees for 5 years in addition to their salary.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
8. With reference to the northeast (winter) monsoon, consider the following statements:
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recognises October to December as the time for the northeast monsoon.
 - This season contributes nearly 75 per cent to India's annual rainfall.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) **1 only**
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
9. With reference to the Greater Adjutant stork, consider the following statements:
- It is one of the rarest species of Storks out of twenty species of Storks in the world.
 - It is now restricted to a few isolated pockets in Assam and Bihar in India and PrekToal in Cambodia.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
10. With reference to the restructuring of Railways, consider the following statements:
- The Cabinet recently approved trimming of the Railway Board, from nine, the Board will now have only five Members.
 - The Cabinet also decided to merge all central service cadres of Railways officers into a single Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS).
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
11. With reference to the Abetment of suicide, consider the following statements:
- It is an offence under section 306 of the Indian penal code, 1860.
 - It is a bailable charge.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) **1 only**
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
12. Patola is the trademark Saree of which of the following state?
- (a) Tamil Nadu
(b) Odisha
(c) Uttar Pradesh
(d) **Gujarat**
13. With reference to the child marriage, consider the following statements:
- The Supreme Court has held in a recent judgment that the anti-child marriage law does not intend to punish a male aged between 18 and 21 years for marrying a “female adult”.
 - Section 9 of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 neither punish a child for marrying a woman nor a woman for marrying a male child.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only

- (c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
14. Lai Haraoba is a ritualistic festival observed in:
- (a) **Tripura**
(b) Himachal Pradesh
(c) Nagaland
(d) Sikkim
15. With reference to the 2019 report released by Forest Survey of India (FSI) on Forest Fires, consider the following statements:
1. About 21.4% of forest cover in India is prone to fires, with forests in the south India being the most vulnerable.
 2. One of the major reasons for forest fires in the north-east is slash-and-burn cultivation, commonly called jhoom or jhum cultivation.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) **2 only**
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
16. With reference to the Indian Railway Protection Force Service, consider the following statements:
1. Recently the Railways renamed the Railway Protection Force (RPF) as Indian Railway Protection Force Service and accorded it organised Group A status (OGAS).
 2. Railway Protection Force (RPF) is responsible for all aspects of railways security.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) **1 only**
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
17. With reference to the EVALI (e-cigarette, or vaping, product use associated lung injury), consider the following statements:
1. It is the name given by the World Health Organization (WHO) to the dangerous, newly identified lung disease linked to vaping.
 2. In the most severe and life-threatening cases, it causes the lungs to stop functioning altogether.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
(b) **2 only**
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
18. With reference to the 'World Braille Day', consider the following statements:

1. The day is marked to remember the birth anniversary of Louis Braille, the inventor of Braille - for people with visual disabilities.
2. The Braille Script consists of raised dots arranged in "cells".

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2