

AGRICULTURE**Centre increases minimum support price for raw jute****Why in News?**

Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has increased the MSP for raw jute for 2024-25 to Rs 5335 per quintal.

About Jute Industry:

- The Jute industry occupies an important place in the national economy of India. It is one of the major industries in the eastern region, particularly in West Bengal.
- Jute, the 'golden fibre', meets all the standards for 'safe' packaging in view of being a natural, renewable, biodegradable and eco-friendly product.
- India is a major player in global jute production, contributing 70% of the world's jute output.
- The Jute industry directly employs approximately 3.7 lakh workers, with around 90% of the production consumed domestically.
- About 73% of jute industries are concentrated in West Bengal (out of 108 composite jute mills 79 are in West Bengal).

Production and Export Data (2022-23):

- In the fiscal year 2022-23, the production of jute goods reached a significant milestone, totalling 1,246,500 metric tons (MT).
- Exports of jute goods surged to 177,270 MT, constituting approximately 14% of the total production. This represents a remarkable 56% increase in exports compared to figures recorded in 2019-20.
- The rise in exports can be attributed to several factors, including increased demand for environmentally friendly and sustainable products worldwide.
- India imported 121.26 thousand MT of raw jute during the same period.
- The importation primarily stems from the preference for high-quality jute from Bangladesh, which is utilised in the manufacturing of value-added products.
- The top export markets for jute goods include a diverse array of countries such as the USA, France, Ghana, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Côte d'Ivoire, Australia, and Spain.

Key Facts about Jute

- Conditions Required for Cultivation:
 - Temperature: Between 25-35°C
 - Rainfall: Around 150-250 cm
 - Soil Type: Well drained alluvial soil.
- Production:
 - India is the largest producer of jute followed by Bangladesh and China.
 - However, in terms of acreage and trade, Bangladesh takes the lead accounting for three-fourths of the global jute exports in comparison to India's 7%.
 - Jute crop cultivation is concentrated in three States, namely, West Bengal, Assam and Bihar accounting for 99% of the production.
 - It is mainly concentrated in eastern
 - India because of the rich alluvial soil of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta.
- Uses:
 - It is known as the golden fibre. It is used in making gunny bags, mats, ropes, yarn, carpets and other artefacts.

Minimum Support Price (MSP)

- The MSP is a guaranteed price for their produce from the Government.
- MSP is a form of market intervention by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices.
- MSP in India is a price floor set by the government to ensure that farmers receive a minimum price for their agricultural produce, thereby safeguarding their income and encouraging agricultural production.
- Crops under MSP: The government announces MSPs for 22 mandated crops and Fair and Remunerative Prices (FRP) for sugarcane. The mandated crops are 14 crops of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops and two other commercial crops. The list of crops is as follows :
 - Cereals (7): Paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi
 - Pulses (5): Gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil

- Oilseeds (8): Groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and nigerseed
- Raw Cotton
- Raw Jute
- Copra
- De-husked Coconut
- Sugarcane (FRP)
- Virginia flu-cured (VFC)

ECONOMY

Gig Economy

Why in News?

Recently, a study has found that 85% of workers work for more than 8 hours

Gig Economy

- A gig economy is a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organisations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.
- According to a report by Boston Consulting Group, India's gig workforce comprises 15 million workers employed across industries such as software, shared services and professional services.
- According to a 2019 report by the India Staffing Federation, India is the fifth largest in flexi-staffing globally, after the US, China, Brazil and Japan.

Who Works in the Gig Economy

According to an OECD paper, the main motives for working in the gig economy are generating additional income and having work flexibility.

- Free agents: These individuals actively choose independent work as their primary source of income.
- Casual earners: They engage in independent work by choice to supplement their income from other sources.
- Reluctant: These workers primarily rely on independent work for their livelihood but would prefer traditional employment if given the opportunity.
- Financially strapped: They engage in supplemental independent work out of necessity, often due to financial constraints.

Potential of India's Gig Sector

- An estimated 56% of new employment in India is being generated by the gig economy companies across both the blue-collar and white-collar workforce.
- While the gig economy is prevalent among blue-collar jobs in India, the demand for gig workers in white-collar jobs such as project-specific consultants, salespeople, web designers, content writers and software developers is also emerging.
- The gig economy can serve up to 90 million jobs in the non-farm sectors in India with a potential to add 1.25% to the GDP over the "long term".
- As India moves towards its stated goal of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025, the gig economy will be a major building block in bridging the income and unemployment gap.

Associated Challenges with the Gig Sector

- Unregulated Nature:
 - The gig economy thrives largely unregulated; therefore workers have little job security and few benefits.
 - However, few argue that the gig economy in India with respect to workers not getting any social security, insurance, etc. is an extension of India's informal labour, which has been prevalent for a long time and has remained unregulated.
- Need for Skills:
 - A worker needs to be skilled enough. Unless a person is extremely talented, his bargaining power will necessarily be limited.
 - While companies routinely invest in training employees, a gig-economy worker will have to upgrade his skills on his own at his own cost..

PRELIM FACTS

1. NATO

Sweden officially joins NATO

About NATO:

- It is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.
- There are currently 32 member states.
- Its original members were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Original signatories were later joined by Greece and Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955, from 1990 as Germany), Spain (1982), the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020), Finland (2023), Sweden (2024).
- France withdrew from the integrated military command of NATO in 1966 but remained a member of the organization; it resumed its position in NATO's military command in 2009.
- Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium.
- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations: Mons, Belgium.

Objectives of NATO

- NATO's essential and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means.
- Political objectives: NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- Military Objectives: NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.
- These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty - Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.
- NATO has only once invoked Article 5, on 12th September 2001 following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the US.

2. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

Recently, the central govt extended the Ujjwala subsidy for another year.

About PMUY :

- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MOPNG), introduced the 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' (PMUY) as a flagship scheme with the objective of making clean cooking fuel such as LPG available to the rural and deprived households which were otherwise using traditional cooking fuels such as firewood, coal, cowdung cakes etc.
- Usage of traditional cooking fuels had detrimental impacts on the health of rural women as well as on the environment.

Objectives:

- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning fossil fuel.

Ujjwala 2.0:

- In the Union budget for FY 21-22, provision for the release of additional 1 crore LPG connections to the eligible households by March 31, 2022.
- The target of releasing additional 1 crore LPG connections under Ujjwala 2.0 was achieved in January 2022. Subsequently, it was decided to release additional 60 lakh LPG connections under Ujjwala 2.0. OMCs have achieved the target of releasing 1.6 Crore LPG Connections under Ujjwala 2.0 on 31st December 2022.

3. Orans

Communities, particularly those in western Rajasthan, are concerned about the State's proposal to classify orans (sacred groves) as deemed forests.

About Orans

- Orans are traditional sacred groves found in Rajasthan.
- These are community forests, preserved and managed by rural communities through institutions and codes that mark such forests as sacred.

- There are often local deities associated with Oran. They are rich in biodiversity and usually include a water body.
- Communities in Rajasthan have been conserving these Orans for centuries, and their lives have been intricately linked around these spaces.
- Orans are also spaces where herders take their livestock for grazing and are places for communal congregations, festivals and other social events, the performance of which is linked to agrarian rhythms and the continued commitment of the communities towards environmental conservation.
- Orans also form the natural habitat for India's most critically endangered bird, the Great Indian Bustard (GIB), a protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act, which is also the State bird of Rajasthan.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred Groves are relic forest patches traditionally protected by communities in reverence of a deity. They form important repositories of forest biodiversity and provide refuge to many plant and animal species of conservation significance.
- Sacred groves are found all over India, especially in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- These are known as Kavu/Sarpa Kavu in Kerala, Devarakadu/Devkad in Karnataka, Deorai/Devrai in Maharashtra, Jahera/Thakuramma in Odisha, etc.

4. Sea Defenders 2024

The United States Coast Guard's (USCG) Bertholf ship reached Port Blair ahead of the 'Sea Defenders-2024' joint exercise.

About Sea Defenders 2024:

- It is a joint exercise between the Indian Coast Guard and the United States Coast Guard.
- It was conducted off the coast of Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The two-day exercise will focus on maritime piracy and asymmetric threats, including simulated drone attacks on commercial merchant traffic, joint maritime search and rescue operations, major firefighting, marine pollution response, and counter-drug interdiction exercises.
- The event will also witness a simulated medical evacuation to enhance readiness in emergency situations.

Indian Coast Guard (ICG):

- It is an armed force that protects India's maritime interests and enforces maritime law, with jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- The ICG, working in coordination with other Union agencies, institutions and authorities, safeguards the maritime interests and security of India, assists vessels and fisherman in distress and protects the maritime environment.
- History: It was formally established in 1978 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978, as an independent armed force of India.
- Parent ministry: It operates under the Ministry of Defence.
- Administration: The organization is headed by the Director General Indian Coast Guard (DGICG).

5. Sea Defenders 2024

Resistance to the antiretroviral drug dolutegravir (DTG) is increasing among HIV patients, a new report by the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted.

About Dolutegravir (DTG):

- It is an antiviral drug used with other medications to treat human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, the virus that can cause the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- Dolutegravir is in a class of medications called HIV integrase inhibitors. It works by decreasing the amount of HIV in your blood and increasing the number of immune cells.
- Although dolutegravir does not cure HIV, using it along with other medications may decrease your chance of developing AIDS and HIV-related illnesses such as serious infections or cancer.
- WHO has recommended the use of dolutegravir as the preferred first- and second-line HIV treatment for all population groups.
- It is more effective, easier to take and has fewer side effects than other drugs currently in use.
- Common side effects of dolutegravir may include:
 - headache;

- tiredness; or
- sleep problems (insomnia).
- severe skin rashes
- allergies
- liver problems

HIV/AIDS

- AIDS is a chronic, potentially lifethreatening condition caused by HIV.
- HIV attacks the body's immune system, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.
- If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS.
- Transmission:
 - It is a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
 - It can also be spread by contact with infected blood, and from illicit injection drug use or by sharing needles.
 - It can also be spread from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.
- Treatment:
 - There is currently no effective cure. Once people get HIV, they have it for life.
 - But with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled. People with HIV who get effective HIV treatment (called antiretroviral therapy, or ART) can live long, healthy lives and protect their partners.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. There are arguments that bills of national importance should be placed before the Inter-State Council prior to their introduction in the Parliament. Discuss in light of the issues that have been observed in the passage of bills in the Parliament in recent times.

The Constitution of India, under the Seventh Schedule, has provided three lists delineating subjects on which Centre and States can legislate. However, there are often demands raised by States regarding the need for taking their views on bills of national importance placed in Parliament that are likely to affect the interests of States.

Reasons for increasing demand:

- Undermining will of the collective opinion of State legislatures: States often feel that the Union government side-lines the collective opinion of the State Assembly. For example, bifurcation of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh was done against the resolution of the State legislature.
- Hasty passage of bills: Passage of bills with minimal or no debate made the States, especially those ruled by opposition parties, question the mechanism of introduction of bills in the Parliament. For example, The Tribunals Reforms Bill 2021, Aadhaar Bill, etc.
- Apprehensions over Article 253: This empowers Parliament to make laws for whole or any part of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, convention with any other country or countries, international conferences, etc.
- Alleged misuse of Article 249: Which empowers Parliament to enact laws on a State list often receives backlash from the states for usurping their powers.
- Unnecessary litigation: Lack of coordination and consensus among executives of States and Union leads to filing litigation and thus delay in the implementation of bills.
- Side-lining Parliamentary Committees: According to data by PRS Legislative Research, the percentage of Bills referred to Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) declined from 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14) to 25% in the 16th Lok Sabha and just around 13% in the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-21).

Challenges in introducing bills at the Inter-State Council:

- Lack of technical team to study the bills: The Inter-State Council (ISC) lacks a dedicated administrative mechanism with subject experts to study the bills.
- Inter-State Council is not meeting regularly: Since its constitution in 1990, the body has met only 11 times, with its last meeting being held in 2016.
- Composition: The Inter-State Council with the current composition lacks representation of Members of Parliament who otherwise take part and express their voters will.
- Delay in passing bills: Debate over bills at both ISC and Parliament may further delay the passage of bills.

The need of the hour is to restore the trust of State governments and uphold the spirit of cooperative federalism. This can be done by improving parliamentary functioning, promoting asymmetrical federalism, mandating bills to parliamentary committees, and establishing GST-like councils in matters of health, agriculture, etc.

MCQs

1. The Cabinet Committee on Security, recently in news is headed by?
 - (a) Union Home Minister
 - (b) Prime Minister**
 - (c) Defence Minister
 - (d) Minister of External Affairs
2. Global Economic Prospectus is prepared by
 - (a) IMF
 - (b) WTO
 - (c) WB**
 - (d) ADB
3. Consider the following statements regarding credit rating agencies:
 1. In India credit rating agencies are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.
 2. The rating agency popularly known as ICRA is a public limited company.
 3. Brickwork Ratings is an Indian credit rating agency.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - (a) Only one
 - (b) Only two**
 - (c) All three
 - (d) None
4. Consider the following statements about NATO
 1. Its headquarter is located at Brussels.
 2. Sweden recently became joined it.
 Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2**
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
5. 'BioCarbon Fund Initiative for Sustainable Forest Landscapes' is managed by the
 - (a) IMF
 - (b) WTO
 - (c) WB**
 - (d) ADB
6. Consider the following statements with respect to Orans:
 1. They are traditional sacred groves found in Chhattisgarh.
 2. They form the natural habitat for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB).
 Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?
 - (a) 1 only**
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. Consider the following statements:
 1. The British constructed the first railway line in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir from Jammu to Sialkot.
 2. Banihal-Sangaldan railway line is a part of the Jammu-Poonch Railway Line project.
 3. Banihal-Sangaldan railway line includes India's longest tunnel.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - (a) Only one
 - (b) Only two**
 - (c) All three
 - (d) None
8. Consider the following statements about the "Tea Board" in India
 1. It is a statutory body
 2. It is regulated by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare
 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. Consider the following:
 1. Global positioning satellites
 2. Nuclear technology
 3. Chemical and biological tools
 4. Household appliances
 5. Military radar systems
 How many of the above items are considered as "dual-use" items?
 - (a) Only one
 - (b) Only two
 - (c) Only three**
 - (d) all five
10. With reference to the Gaganyaan Mission, consider the following statements:
 1. The Crew Module of the Mission is responsible for generating power, providing propulsion for orbital maneuvers, and performing altitude control during the mission.
 2. Human Rated LVM3 will be responsible for launching the Orbital Module into the Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
 Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only**
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2