

PERFECT 7

WEEKLY

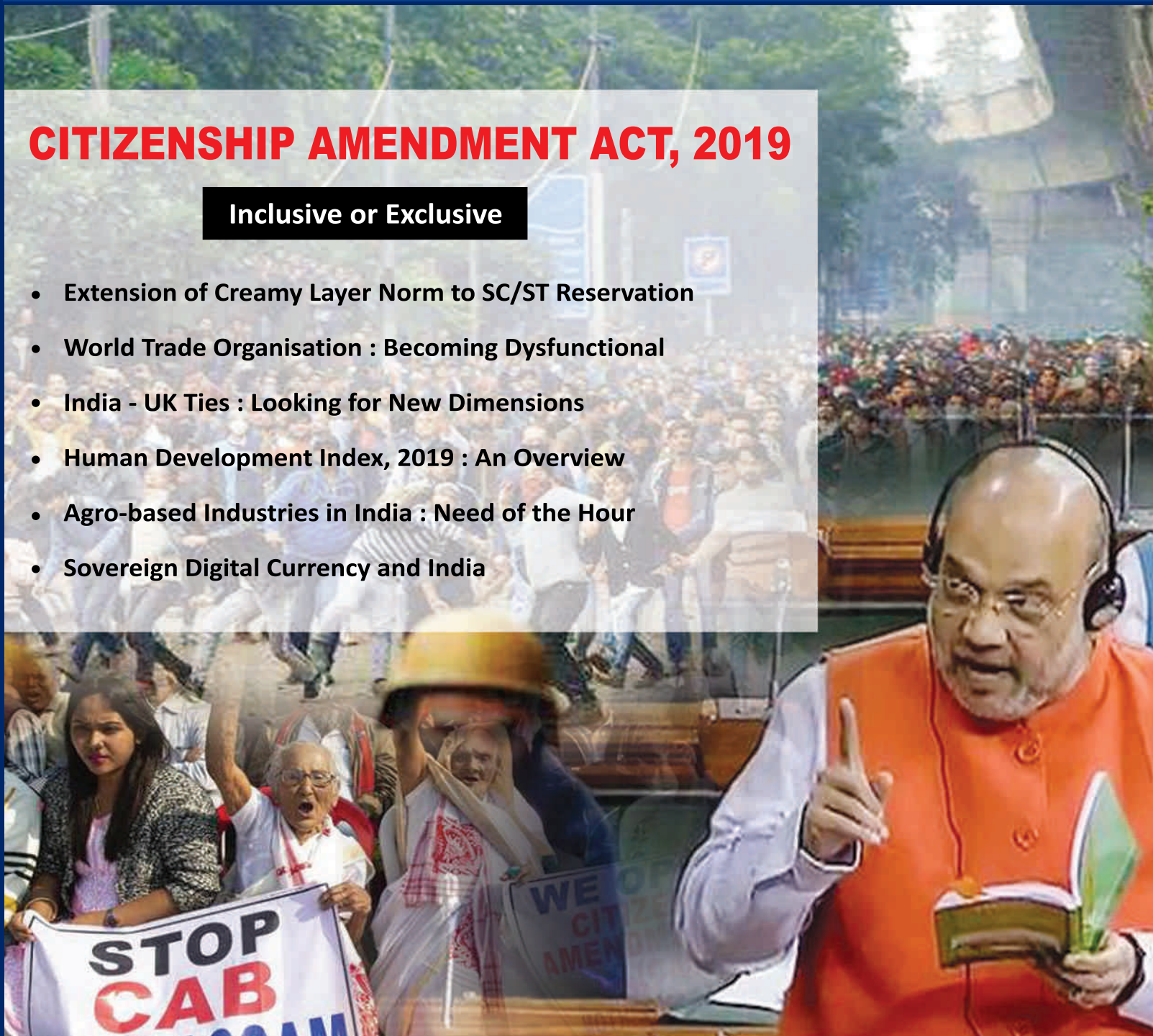
CURRENT AFFAIRS

December : 2019/ Issue- 4

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT, 2019

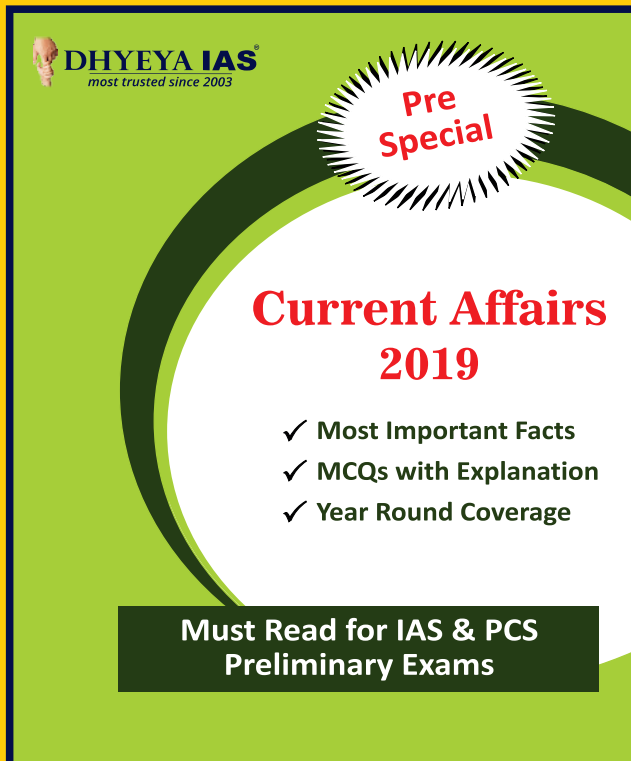
Inclusive or Exclusive

- Extension of Creamy Layer Norm to SC/ST Reservation
- World Trade Organisation : Becoming Dysfunctional
- India - UK Ties : Looking for New Dimensions
- Human Development Index, 2019 : An Overview
- Agro-based Industries in India : Need of the Hour
- Sovereign Digital Currency and India

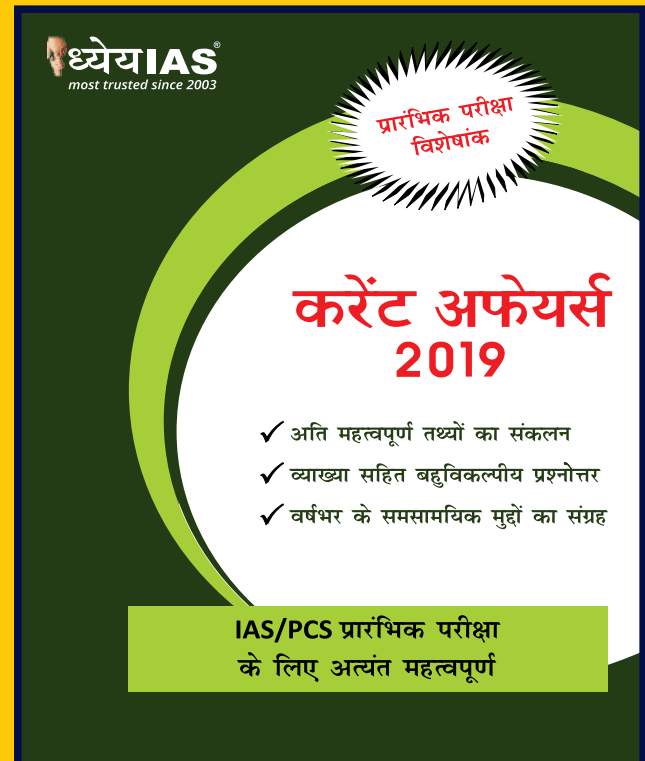


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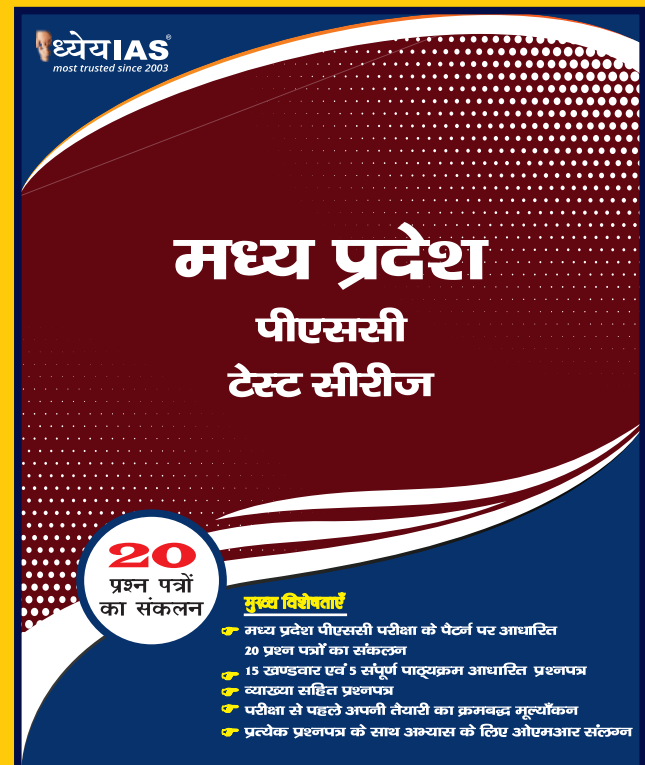
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DHYEYA IAS : AN INTRODUCTION



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Vinay Kumar Singh
CEO and Founder
Dhyeya IAS



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Q H Khan
Managing Director
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PERFECT 7 : AN INTRODUCTION



With immense pleasure and gratitude I want to inform you that the new version of 'Perfect-7', from the Dhyeya IAS, is coming with more information in a very attractive manner. Heartily congratulations to the editorial team. The 'Perfect-7' invites a wider readership in the Institute. The name and fame of an institute depends on the caliber and achievements of the students and teachers. The role of the teacher is to nurture the skills and talents of the students as a facilitator. This magazine is going to showcase the strength of our Institute. Let this be a forum to exhibit the potential of faculties, eminent writers, authors and students with their literary skills and innovative ideas.

Qurban Ali

Chief Editor

Dhyeya IAS

(Ex Editor- Rajya Sabha TV)



We have not only given the name 'Perfect 7' to our magazine, but also left no stone unturned to keep it 'near to perfect'. We all know that beginning of a task is most challenging as well as most important thing. So we met the same fate.

Publishing 'Perfect 7' provided us various challenges because from the beginning itself we kept our bar too high to ensure the quality. Right from the very first issue we had a daunting task to save aspirants from the 'overdose of information'. Focusing on civil services exams 'Perfect 7' embodies in itself rightful friend and guide in your preparation. This weapon is built to be precise yet comprehensive. It is not about bombardment of mindless facts rather an analysis of various facets of the issues, selected in a systematic manner. We adopted the 'Multi Filter' and 'Six Sigma' approach, in which a subject or an issue is selected after diligent discussion on various levels so that the questions in the examination could be covered with high probability.

Being a weekly magazine there is a constant challenge to provide qualitative study material in a time bound approach. It is our humble achievement that we feel proud to make delivered our promise of quality consistently without missing any issue since its inception.

The new 'avatar' of 'Perfect 7' is a result of your love and affection. We feel inspired to continue our efforts to deliver effective and valuable content in interesting manner. Our promise of quality has reached you in previous issues and more are yet to come.

Ashutosh Singh

Managing Editor

Dhyeya IAS

Send us your suggestions, comments, views and feedback for guiding us towards continuous improvement & enhancement of 'Perfect 7' on

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PREFACE

Dhyeya family feels honoured to present you 'Perfect 7' - a panacea for Current Affairs. 'Perfect7' is an outstanding compilation of current affairs topics as per the new pattern of Civil Service examination (CSE). It presents weekly analysis of information and issues (national and international) in the form of articles, news analysis, brain boosters, PIB highlights and graphical information, which helps to understand and retain the information comprehensively. Hence, 'Perfect 7' will build in-depth understanding of various issues in different facets.

'Perfect7' is our genuine effort to provide correct, concise and concrete information, which helps students to crack the civil service examination. This magazine is the result of the efforts of the eminent scholars and the experts from different fields.

'Perfect 7' is surely a force multiplier in your effort and plugs the loopholes in the preparation.

We believe in environment of continuous improvement and learning. Your constructive suggestions and comments are always welcome, which could guide us in further revision of this magazine.

Omveer Singh Chaudhary
Editor
Dhyeya IAS

Perfect 7

The Weekly Issue

Perfect 7

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(Ex. Editor Rajya Sabha, TV) & by Team Dhyeya IAS
(Broadcasted on YouTube & Dhyeya-TV)

SEVEN IMPORTANT ISSUES

1. CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT, 2019 : INCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIVE

Why in News?

President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019, turning it into an Act. It seeks to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955 and proposes to grant citizenship to the Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhist, Jains and Parsis who come to India after facing religious persecution from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh on or before December 31, 2014.

Key Highlights

Definition of Illegal Migrants:

The Citizenship Act, 1955 prohibits illegal migrants from acquiring Indian citizenship. The new Act amended the previous Act to provide that the following minority groups will not be treated as illegal migrants: Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, to get this benefit, they must have also been exempted from the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 by the central government.

Consequences of Acquiring Citizenship: The Act says that on acquiring citizenship: (i) such persons shall be deemed to be citizens of India from the date of their entry into India, and (ii) all legal proceedings against them in respect of their illegal migration or citizenship will be closed.

Exception: Further, the Act adds that the provisions on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to the

tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, or Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District. It will also not apply to the areas under the 'Inner Line Permit', under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. The Inner Line Permit regulates visit of Indians to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

Citizenship by Naturalization:

The 1955 Act allows a person to apply for citizenship by naturalisation if he meets certain qualifications. One of these is that the person must have resided in India or served the central government for a certain period of time: (i) for the 12 months immediately preceding the application for citizenship, and (ii) for 11 of the 14 years preceding the 12-month period. For people belonging to the same six religions and three countries, the amendment relaxes the 11-year requirement to five years.

Cancellation of Registration of Overseas Citizen (OCI) of India

Cardholder: The 1955 Act provides that the central government may cancel registration of OCIs on certain grounds, including: (i) if the OCI had registered through fraud, or (ii) if within five years of registration, the OCI was sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more. The Amendment Act adds one more ground for cancelling registration, that

is, if the OCI has violated any law in the country.

The Legal and Constitutional Aspects

An examination of the text of Article 11 of the Indian Constitution reveals that Parliament is empowered to make any law relating to the acquisition or termination of citizenship and all other matters relating to citizenship. Further, it was the intent of the framers of the Constitution for Parliament to have the power to include those who, at the time of the Constitution coming into existence, were not included within the fold of the citizenship laws. It is therefore well within the rights of Parliament to enact this legislation and it stands the test of procedural due process.

In the case of Ram Krishna Dalmia vs Justice S R Tendolkar, the true meaning and scope of Article 14 was reiterated as follows; "It is now well-established that while Article 14 forbids class legislation, it does not forbid reasonable classification for the purposes of legislation. In order, however, to pass the test of permissible classification, two conditions must be fulfilled. (i) that the classification must be founded on an intelligible differentia which distinguishes persons or things that are grouped together from others left out of the group, and (ii) that differentia must have a rational relation to the object sought to be achieved by the statute in question.

Why the Act is facing Opposition?

Legal experts and Opposition leaders have argued that it violates the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India. One argument made in Parliament is that the law violates Article 14 that guarantees equal protection of laws. According to the legal test prescribed by Supreme Court, for a law to satisfy the conditions under Article 14, it has to first create a “reasonable class” of subjects that it seeks to govern under the law.

Second, the legislation has to show a “rational nexus” between the subject and the object it seeks to achieve. Even if the classification is reasonable, any person who falls in that category has to be treated alike. If protecting the persecuted minorities is ostensibly the objective of the law, then the exclusion of some countries and using religion as a yardstick may fall foul of the test.

Further, granting citizenship on the grounds of religion is seen to be against the secular nature of the Constitution which has been recognised as part of the basic structure that cannot be altered by Parliament.

Another argument is that the law does not account for other categories of migrants who may claim persecution in other countries. The law will not extend to those persecuted in Myanmar (Rohingya Muslims) and Sri Lanka (Tamils). Further, by not allowing Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims who face persecution in Pakistan, or the Hazras, Tajiks and Uzbeks who faced persecution by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the law is being seen as potentially violating Article 14.

Further argument given against the amendment is that, although it does not exclude any Indian citizen. However, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the latest citizenship law cannot be decoupled. The final NRC left out over 19 lakh people. The new

law gives a fresh chance to the Bengali Hindus left out to acquire citizenship, whereas the same benefit will not be available to a Muslim left out, who will have to fight a legal battle. Also the government repeated assertion of the fact that the NRC process in Assam will be replicated in the rest of the country is fuelling fears among Indian Muslims. Plugged with NRC, the new amendment becomes an enabling law to potentially disenfranchise an individual of a religion not mentioned in the amendment.

The rationale for a nationwide NRC, its feasibility, and, above all, its moral legitimacy, is questionable. Under the Foreigners’ Act, 1946, the burden of proof rests on the individual charged with being a foreigner. Since the Citizenship Act provides no independent mechanism for identifying aliens — remember the Supreme Court struck down the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, or IMDT Act, in 2005 — the NRC effectively places an entire population under suspicion of alienage.

The Act also provides wide discretion to the government to cancel OCI registrations for both major offences like murder, as well as minor offences like parking in a no-parking zone or jumping a red light.

The North-East Question

The new Act has polarised the North-east and triggered a process of social and political realignment. Most disquietingly, it threatens to expose the faultlines that had led to the rise of sub-nationalist politics in the region in the 1980s. Mizoram fears Buddhist Chakmas and Hindu Hajongs from Bangladesh may take advantage of the Act. Meghalaya and Nagaland are apprehensive of migrants of Bengali stock. Groups in Arunachal Pradesh fear the new rules may benefit Chakmas and Tibetans. Manipur wants the 'Inner Line Permit' system to stop outsiders from entering the state.

In Assam, what is primarily driving the protests is not who are excluded from the ambit of the new law, but how many are included. The protesters are worried about the prospect of the arrival of more migrants, irrespective of religion, in a state whose demography and politics have been defined by migration. The Assam Movement (1979-85) was built around migration from Bangladesh, which many Assamese fear will lead to their culture and language being overtaken, besides putting pressure on land resources and job opportunities.

The protesters’ argument is that the new law violates the Assam Accord of 1985, which sets March 24, 1971 as the cutoff for Indian citizenship. This is also the cut-off for the NRC in Assam, whose final version was published this year. Under the new law, the cutoff is December 31, 2014, for Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists and Jains from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Government Rationale

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is not about excluding anybody; it is about including some. It is an effort to grant citizenship to those minorities from erstwhile Pakistan — that now includes Pakistan and Bangladesh — and Afghanistan, who have come to India seeking refuge from religious persecution or the fear of it.

Every time such refugees come to India and claim citizenship, the government has been issuing citizenship to them after the due process. There are a number of instances of religious minorities from these three countries coming over to India on religious visas and deciding to stay back because of the dangerous situations that existed back home. They include Sikhs from Afghanistan, Sindhis and SCs from Pakistan and Bengalis and tribals from Bangladesh. What the government intends to do through the new Act

is simplify the process of granting of citizenship to these minorities. Earlier, there was a 12-year wait under the regular citizenship laws. The new Act reduced that period to five years.

Granting citizenship to sections of the population is a regular process. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, lakhs of Hindus and other minorities had poured into India. This migration was no smaller than at the time of Partition. A majority of them had come to states like Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Similar facilities were extended to persecuted Indians from Uganda during Idi Amin's rule.

Partition has an important historical bearing on the issue. We can't shut our eyes to the fact that India was partitioned on religious lines and large-scale communal violence erupted as a result. Between 1947 and 1950, millions crossed over to either side. They all became citizens of the respective countries. But then, it came to the knowledge of the authorities that even after 1950, the migration was continuing into the North-east for reasons that were not necessarily Partition-related. It was then that the Jawaharlal Nehru government promulgated 'The Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950'. The then Prime Minister Nehru was categorical that the Act wouldn't apply to minority immigrants like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Sikhs.

The new Act is a continuation of that unfinished agenda. It has become necessary that the issue of the illegal immigrants be addressed in one go, as their numbers have swelled to millions in the last several decades. This new Act will come as a big boon to all those hapless people who have been the victims of Partition and the subsequent conversion of the three countries into theocratic Islamic republics.

Far from being anti-secular, Indian citizenship was a commitment given by

our leaders to the minorities. That is precisely what the present government is fulfilling now. India has several other refugees that include Tamils from Sri Lanka and Hindu Rohingya from Myanmar. They are not covered under this Act. Similarly, the Nepalese and others from neighbouring countries are guided either by bilateral agreements or the citizenship laws of our country.

Concerns of some sections in the North-east have also been adequately addressed by excluding Schedule VI areas and the Inner Line Permit-restricted areas from the purview of the new Act. The CAA is a law applicable to the entire country. The government will make sure that no state shall face any adverse impact on its demography, culture, language and customs.

In its two millennia-long history, India has always welcomed persecuted minorities, like the Parsis, Jews and others, from wherever they came. The CAA is a continuation of that national tradition.

Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950

In the aftermath of Partition and the communal riots that followed, Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan signed a treaty, also known as the Delhi Agreement, on security and rights of minorities in their respective countries. According to the pact Governments of India and Pakistan solemnly agree that each shall ensure, to the minorities throughout its territory, complete equality of citizenship, irrespective of religion, a full sense of security in respect of life, culture, property and personal honour, freedom of movement within each country and freedom of occupation, speech and worship, subject to law and morality.

Members of the minorities shall have equal opportunity with members of the majority community to participate in the public life of their country, to hold political or other office, and to serve in their country's civil and armed forces. Both Governments declare these rights to be fundamental and undertake to enforce them effectively.

The present government claims India has kept its end of the bargain while Pakistan has failed, and it is this wrong that the new law seeks to correct.

Conclusion

Religious persecution has always been there and all religions are guilty of it. The government is, therefore, right in recognising religious persecution. But the solution it presents may damage India's standing in the comity of nations.

Undoubtedly, the CAA is a very serious move with far-reaching consequences and deeper impact on the basic character of the Constitution and therefore it needs a closer look. India has to undertake a balancing act here. India's citizenship provisions are derived from the perception of the country as a secular republic. In fact, it is a refutation of the two-nation theory that proposed a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan. Independent India adopted a Constitution that rejected discrimination on the basis of religion and the birth of Bangladesh undermined the idea that religion could be the basis of a national community. We need to balance the civilization duties to protect those who are prosecuted in the neighbourhood. Shared identity is at the core of citizenship. The framers of our Constitution and those who enacted the Citizenship Act in 1955 believed in citizenship as a unifying idea and it must be continued to seen in such framework only.

General Studies Paper- II

Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.



2. EXTENSION OF CREAMY LAYER NORM TO SC/ST RESERVATION

Why in News?

Central government has requested the Supreme Court (SC) to reconsider a Constitution bench decision on the issue of creamy layer within the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs), pronounced in the 2018 case of Jarnail Singh v. Lachhmi Narayan Gupta, by referring it to a larger bench. The Jarnail Singh judgment, authored by Justice Rohinton Nariman, had held that the creamy layer within SC/STs will be excluded from the benefits of reservation in promotion policies.

Introduction

The debate on reservation is highly polarised and, usually, brings out the worst in us. Arguments made by all the sides are logical and extremely passionate. It can be challenging to evolve a middle path that includes opposing perspectives. On the one hand, there is a school of thought that derides reservation and advocates a merit-based order. On the other hand, there are ferocious supporters of reservation who consider any debate around reforms as blasphemous. Merit is contextual and means different things to different people. Caste creates networks and upper castes, through years of institutional linkages, have established an infrastructure that invariably helps in mentorship and handholding. This is missing for the Dalits. Even the exceptionally skilled and competent Dalits are first treated as Dalits, everything else becomes secondary.

A study by Sukhadeo Thorat and Paul Attewell in 2010 had reportedly observed that “for equally qualified SC and upper caste (about 4,800 each) applicants, SCs had 67 per cent less chance of receiving calls for an interview. What is more disturbing

is that the high percentage of less qualified high castes (undergraduate) received calls compared with the more qualified SCs (post-graduates).”

However, this does not absolve the people on the other side of the spectrum who become absolutists when it comes to reservations. Political reservation was never intended to perpetuate the interests of a single family. The case of some regional political party can provide a stark example. The community can see through this hypocrisy. There are a lot of difficult questions that we need to confront as a community.

Insight into the Concept of ‘Creamy Layer’

The concept has its genesis in a 1992 Supreme Court judgment in the Indira Sawhney vs Union of India case. Since then, two other significant Supreme Court judgments — one in M. Nagaraj vs Union of India and another in the Jarnail Singh case — have laid down the law in this regard.

The Mandal Commission was set up in 1979 under Article 340 of the Constitution of India by the Janata Party government with a mandate to “identify the socially or educationally backwards”. It laid down 11 indicators or criteria for determining social and economic backwardness. In light of this report, the government provided 27 per cent reservation in central government jobs for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1990. This was challenged in the Supreme Court by several writ petitions.

A nine-judge bench in the Indira Sawhney case had upheld reservations for OBCs in 1992, but ruled that creamy layer among the backward class of citizens must be excluded “by fixation of proper income, property

or status criteria” by the central government. The court asserted that on these specifications, people falling in the creamy layer would not get the benefit of reservations. The Supreme Court also held that reservations in appointments — under Article 16(4) of the Constitution — do not apply to promotions.

The 1993 Creamy Layer Norms

Following the SC judgment, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) had laid down categories under the creamy layer in 1993.

According to the 1993 order, sons and daughters of Group A/Class I Officers of All India Central and State Services (direct recruits), Group B/Class II Officers of Central and State Services (direct recruits), employees of Public Sector Undertakings etc. and armed forces fall within the creamy layer, and, therefore, they would not be entitled to reservation benefits.

The order also included within the creamy layer sons and daughters of people with a gross annual income of Rs 1 lakh above or possessing wealth above the exemption limit as prescribed under the Wealth Tax Act for a period of three consecutive years. However, the ceiling has been revised only four times since 1993 — the last time it happened was in September 2017 when the cap was raised to Rs 8 lakh per annum.

The Amendments that Followed

Meanwhile, in order to change the effect of the judgment in the Indira Sawhney case, there were some amendments to enable the government to make laws regarding reservation in promotion for SCs and STs. The first of these amendments was when the Parliament enacted the Constitution (77th Amendment) Act,

1995, inserting Article 16(4A), thereby enabling the government to make laws providing quota in promotion for SCs and STs. Article 16(4B) was also inserted, providing that reserved promotion posts for SCs and STs that remain unfilled can be carried forward to the subsequent year. While the SC judgement in the Indra Sawhney case capped the reservation quota at 50 per cent, the government's amendment ensured that the 50 per cent ceiling for these carried-forward unfilled posts does not apply to subsequent years.

Another instance was when Article 335 of the Constitution was amended during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government in 2001. While Article 335 specified that reservations have to be balanced with the "maintenance of efficiency", the 2001 amendment stated that the Article will not apply to the government if it relaxes evaluation standards in matters of promotion. 'Maintenance of efficiency' is a constitutional limitation on the discretion of the government in making reservation in promotion for SCs and STs.

Creamy Layer to SCs & STs

These amendments led to the 2006 Supreme Court judgment in *M. Nagaraj vs Union of India*, where a five-judge bench approved Parliament's decision to extend reservations for SCs and STs to include promotions with three conditions.

It required the government to provide proof for the backwardness of the class benefitting from the reservation, for its inadequate representation in the position/service for which reservation in promotion is to be granted and to show how reservations in promotions would further administrative efficiency. The judgment also held that the creamy layer concept was applicable to SCs and STs.

Offering respite

The Supreme Court has held that there is no need to collect quantifiable data of backwardness to provide reservation in promotions in government jobs for SCs/STs

The Nagaraj verdict

- The court in the *M. Nagaraj* verdict in 2006 had said that States were bound to provide quantifiable data on the backwardness of SCs/STs before providing them quota in promotions



The Indra Sawhney verdict of 1992

- The Supreme Court had held that a "test or requirement of social and educational backwardness cannot be applied to SCs/STs, who indubitably fall within the expression 'backward class of citizens'"

The court held that the portion of data collection in the Nagaraj judgment was "contrary" to the Indra Sawhney verdict, and held it "invalid"

What next?

The judgment will boost efforts to provide "accelerated promotion with consequential seniority" for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes members in government services

The *M. Nagaraj* case judgment was challenged in the *Jarnail Singh* case via two reference orders, the latest one having been issued in November 2017, stating that it needed to be referred to a seven-judge bench.

The top court refused to refer it to a larger bench, asserting that even though it had not expressly chosen to apply the creamy layer principle to SCs and STs in its verdict in the *Indra Sawhney* case, the principle can still be applied in view of the principles of equality enshrined in Constitution.

The court also asserted that the SCs and High Courts would be well within their jurisdiction to exclude creamy layer from getting reservations, rejecting the central government's submissions that only the Parliament can exclude or include people from SC/ST lists.

The Court observed that the whole object of reservation is to see that backward classes of citizens move forward so that they may march hand in hand with other citizens of India on an equal basis. This will not be possible if only the creamy layer within that class bag all the coveted jobs in the public sector and perpetuate themselves, leaving the rest of the class as backward as they always were.

Arguments Opposing the Verdict

Conflating OBCs with SC/STs

The *Jarnail Singh* decision made an interpretation of earlier judgments. The problem is that these judgments had conflated the OBC issue with that of the SC/STs – the creamy layer principle that was invoked for the OBCs was applied to the question of SC/STs.

Specifically examining the 1992 *Indra Sawhney* judgment, the *Jarnail Singh* judgement of 2018 made two observations that are contradictory. On one hand, it noted that the discussion on the creamy layer concept is limited to backward classes in the *Indra Sawhney*, which had said clearly that "this discussion is confined to OBCs only and has no relevance in the case of STs and SCs". But, on the other hand, the *Jarnail Singh* judgment made the mistake of treating the *Indra Sawhney* judgement to be "a facet of the larger equality principle" (covering both OBCs as well as SC/STs). Both positions are mutually exclusive.

Here, the SC failed to understand the significant difference between OBCs and SC/STs. In a number of judgments, including *Indra Sawhney*, it has been held that the members of the SC are most backward amongst the backward classes and that they are

not required to fulfill any condition of social and educational backwardness. The standard of review for adjudicating the claims of SC/STs and OBCs cannot be the same.

The judgment in Nagaraj, earlier, had made the same mistake. In dealing with the constitutional amendments that allowed reservation in promotions for SC/STs, the judgment had applied the test laid down in Indra Sawhney for OBCs to SC/STs as well.

Creamy Layer not a Principle of Equality

In another Constitution bench judgment in the case of Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India (2008), the SC had reiterated the creamy layer test to be applied to OBCs in admissions to government universities as well as government-aided private universities. Then Chief Justice of India, K.G. Balakrishnan, had said emphatically that the creamy layer principle is inapplicable to SCs and STs because it is merely a principle of identification of the backward class and not applied as a principle of equality. The decision in Jarnail Singh case disagreed with the view of Chief Justice Balakrishnan.

The Creamy Layer Argument

Opponents of reservations in India contend that decades of reservations for SCs and STs had created a 'creamy layer' and that the time has come to exclude their descendants from job quotas. But that is a flawed argument. Centuries of discrimination and harmful stereotypes, and denial of opportunities do not go away if one buys a car or owns a city home.

In a detailed article in Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, Professor Khiara M. Bridges documents the disadvantages that class-privileged people of colour experience in the United States (US). On the basis of these experiences, bridges strongly critiques

Quota Call

2006
SC says creamy layer must be excluded from SC, ST reservations
This would ensure benefits reach the poorest of them

2018
Rejects AG's plea to refer issue to 7-judge bench
Reiterates that creamy layer concept is an inherent part of the principle of equality; will apply to SCs, STs too

2019
AG again wants case to be referred to larger bench
Says issue sensitive



and rejects the notion of 'post-racial' thinking — which opposes race-based affirmative action programmes on the ground that it just benefits class-privileged black people.

The discussion on 'creamy layer' in India is similar to post-racism discourse in the US and needs to be similarly critiqued. It should begin with the Supreme Court reconsidering the condition of creamy layer as laid down in Nagaraj and Jarnail judgments.

Way Forward

The reservation policy type of affirmative action is against discrimination; it is not based on economic consideration because the discrimination is independent of your economic standing. Women are asking for reservation. Have they ever raised the issue that relatively better-off women should not get political reservation? Because they are discriminated based on gender, poor or non-poor.

We have to recognise that while both OBCs and SCs get reservation, the social reality under which Dalits live and the situation under which OBCs live are very different. The contours of reforms in reservation must be developed through a consultative process involving real and potential stakeholders within the Dalit community. The idea of preferential treatment in sectors that are still underrepresented must be explored

objectively. The civil society, industry, media, higher judiciary and the upper echelons of bureaucracy still lack social diversity and, therefore, the empathy required to address the concerns of the community.

Having said that, we also need to insure that all the benefits given should not be cornered by the well off families of the reserved community only. A section of SCs and STs have benefitted, and are constantly benefitting from reservation. Reforms to reservation have become the need of the hour. It is time we transcend our selfish interests and advocate a rethinking of reservation that is more inclusive. We need fresh dialogue and thinking on reservation. Including the excluded will be the real tribute to the Constitution of India.

General Studies Paper- I

Topic: Social empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

General Studies Paper- II

Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.



3. WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION : BECOMING DYSFUNCTIONAL

Why in News?

The highest adjudicating body for resolving global trade disputes at the World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute settlement system could become dysfunctional on December 11, as the United States (US) continues to play hardball by adopting intransigent positions. For the past two years, the US has repeatedly blocked the selection process for filling vacancies at the WTO's Appellate Body (AB). It has been reduced to one member from December 11 from its requisite strength of seven.

Background

Over the last couple of years, the membership of the body has dwindled to three persons (instead of the required seven) as the US has blocked the appointments of new members, and the reappointments of members who had completed their four-year tenures.

At the core of the latest US' complaint is that the existing and former AB members claimed well beyond their mandated remuneration. The US alleged that the amount of compensation per AB member has remained steady and at a high level — more than 300,000 Swiss francs (around \$300,720) annually despite their part-time tenure, while issuing five or six rulings on an average.

Many WTO members, including the European Union and China among others, sharply disagreed with the concerns raised by the US about the compensation package for the AB members. The EU, for example, asked whether it is relevant to talk about the compensation package when the US continues to block the selection process for filling the six vacancies. It showed how the remuneration for

the AB members remained almost consistent since 1995 when it came into existence.

To address the US' concerns, the chair for the dispute settlement body Ambassador David Walker from New Zealand, who acted as the 'Facilitator', had prepared a set of reforms of the dispute settlement understanding (DSU). But the US had disapproved the proposed changes in the DSU arguing that there its fundamental concerns remain unaddressed. On November 12, the US blocked the WTO's biennial budget pointing that there are alleged irregularities in the manner in which funds were disbursed for the AB and improper use of what are called trust funds provided by different governments.

The dispute settlement mechanism requires at least three members to function. As two members — Thomas Graham (US) and Ujal Singh Bhatia (India) —retired on December 11 after their second term of four years, while one member Hong Zhao from China will continue till November 2020 the world trade is about to enter a phase in which there will be no official resolution for many international disputes — potentially creating the circumstances for a free-for-all. It could also signal the demise of the 24-year-old WTO itself, given that the system for settling disputes has been the organisation's most important function.

About WTO

World Trade Organization, as an institution was established in 1995. It replaced General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) which was in place since 1946. In pursuance of World War II, western countries came out with their version of development, which is

moored in promotion of free trade and homogenization of world economy on western lines. This version claims that development will take place only if there is seamless trade among all the countries and there are minimal tariff and non- tariff barriers. That time along with two Bretton wood institutions -IMF and World Bank, an International Trade Organization (ITO) was conceived. ITO was successfully negotiated and agreed upon by almost all countries. It was supposed to work as a specialized arm of United Nation, towards promotion of free trade. However, United States along with many other major countries failed to get this treaty ratified in their respective legislatures and hence it became a dead letter.

Consequently, GATT became de-facto platform for issues related to international trade. It has to its credit some major successes in reduction of tariffs (custom duty) among the member countries. Measures against dumping of goods like imposition of Anti-Dumping Duty in victim countries, had also been agreed upon. It was signed in Geneva by only 23 countries and by 1986, when Uruguay round started (which was concluded in 1995 and led to creation of WTO in Marrakesh, Morocco), 123 countries were already its member. India has been member of GATT since 1948; hence it was party to Uruguay Round and a founding member of WTO. China joined WTO only in 2001 and Russia had to wait till 2012.

Reasons behind Replacing GATT with WTO

While WTO came in existence in 1995, GATT didn't cease to exist. It continues as WTO's umbrella treaty for trade in goods. There were certain limitations of GATT like:

- ◆ It lacked institutional structure. GATT by itself was only the set of rules and multilateral agreements.
- ◆ It didn't cover trade in services, Intellectual Property Rights etc. Its main focus was on Textiles and agriculture sector.
- ◆ A strong dispute resolution mechanism was absent.
- ◆ By developing countries it was seen as a body meant for promoting interests of west. This was because Geneva Treaty of 1946, where GATT was signed had no representation from newly independent states and socialist states.
- ◆ Under GATT countries failed to curb quantitative restrictions on trade (Non-Tariff barriers).

Accordingly WTO seeks to give more weightage to interests of global south in framing of multilateral treaties. Here, a number of other aspects have been brought into, such as Intellectual property under Trade related aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS), Services by General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS), Investments under Trade related Investment Measures (TRIMS).

Benefits of the WTO Trading System

From the money in our pockets and the goods and services that we use, to a more peaceful world—the WTO and the trading system offer a range of benefits, some well-known, others not so obvious. Some of them can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ **The system helps to keep the peace:** This sounds like an exaggerated claim, and it would be wrong to make too much of it. Nevertheless, the system does contribute to international peace.
- ◆ **The system allows disputes to be handled constructively:** As trade expands in volume, in the

numbers of products traded, and in the numbers of countries and companies trading, there is a greater chance that disputes will arise. The WTO system helps resolve these disputes peacefully and constructively

- ◆ **A system based on rules rather than power makes life easier for all:** The WTO cannot claim to make all countries equal. But it does reduce some inequalities, giving smaller countries more voice, and at the same time freeing the major powers from the complexity of having to negotiate trade agreements with each of their numerous trading partners.
- ◆ **Freer trade cuts the cost of living:** We are all consumers. The prices we pay for our food and clothing, our necessities and luxuries, and everything else in between, are affected by trade policies.
- ◆ It gives consumers more choice, and a broader range of qualities to choose from.
- ◆ Trade stimulates economic growth, and that can be good news for employment.

Analysis of its Functioning

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the Geneva based 24-year-old organisation, which is supposed to do the important work of trade monitoring and contribute to the effective functioning of the multilateral trading system, is increasingly toothless and is succumbing to the pressure of the developed countries, especially the US. It, however, still remains the primary instrument governing a rules-based world trading system.

Recently, the US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, held that the WTO was losing its essential focus on negotiations and was becoming a litigation centred organisation which has some truth to it.

It is true that the trading arrangements between countries is increasingly bypassing the WTO and formulating their own agreements.

The US believes the WTO is biased against it, and has criticised it for being “unfair”. The administration of President Donald Trump has, therefore, taken the decision to starve the body of personnel and to disregard its authority — imposing new tariffs on not just China, but also American allies such as Canada, Europe, and Japan.

Trump sees the WTO — which seeks to ensure equal treatment for all its members — as standing in the way of “America First”, tying its hands when it tries to protect American workers or seeks to effectively employ the advantages of being the world’s most powerful economy. Trump administration believe the WTO has encouraged China — helping it to strengthen its economy at the cost of other nations including the US, while doing nothing about the unfair trade practices that it uses widely.

In the past, there was a sympathetic treatment towards developing countries like India, which got special and differential treatment at the WTO which gave them more time and leeway to comply with the WTO rules, but now the US has begun to question this special treatment because countries like India and China are considered large Emerging Economies due to the giant size of their population and hence GDP. Government of India, rightly pointed out that India has to be treated differently because it has to take care of 600 million people who can be considered as poor.

WTO and India

The WTO, along with the IMF and World Bank, has predominantly represented the interests of the developed world aimed specially at prying open developing countries’ markets. India

has not gained much from being in the WTO and resisted opening up its agricultural sector because of millions of small and marginal farmers who would not be able to withstand competition from abroad.

Public stock holding is very important for India's food security and if the issue is not settled, then it may have to roll back its Food Security Act which means compromising on food provision for the poor. There has, however, been no loss of status quo on stock holding and India can continue with its support price programme. But there has to be a permanent solution on how the Minimum Support Price (MSP) is to be fixed because earlier according to the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, the MSP would have to be calculated on the basis of price of foodgrains in 1986-88 and the total subsidy would have to be below 10 per cent of the total value of production. India strongly disputed this formula because the current prices are much higher and hence the total MSP given as subsidy would also be higher.

In agriculture, India and China have opposed the huge production related price distorting subsidies given by the developed countries like the US and the EU to their farmers which make their products cheaper as compared to produce from developing countries, making it harder for them to compete with the advanced countries. US alone gives around USD 150 billion in direct subsidies to farmers which come under the Green Box, according to the rules of GATT, and hence allowed. India's MSP is considered trade distorting and comes under the Amber Box and India is mandated to reduce it. But this issue of high subsidies given by developed countries to their agriculture was not addressed at MC11 even though it has been raised in previous meetings of

the WTO. In general, the US refused to have any dialogue on agricultural reforms.

In the case of fisheries also, China and India did not make commitments to eliminate fisheries subsidies on 'illegal fishing' because of the livelihood of large number of fishermen is involved. The Doha Development Agenda, which the Indian government has been keen to promote and which is based on multilateralism, has been put on hold much to the chagrin of many developing countries comprising the Group of 33.

India has had problems at the WTO with the EU because under its General Agreement on Trade in Services, temporary workers from India should be allowed to move freely within Europe, especially under Mode 4 (rule), but they are not. In the area of Intellectual property rights under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, India has been on the defensive at the WTO and the US has had many spats with the Indian industry for not observing IPR rules.

Other issues which never cropped up before were also raised like the freeing of e-commerce and investment facilitation by a group of countries. China proposed freeing of e-commerce, but India rightly objected. China wants to remove all duties on e-commerce — something which is not feasible in India's case because India's digital penetration is not as deep as China's and freeing of e-commerce will not help the MSMEs as they will not be able to compete with countries with deeper internet penetration which lead to their having better access to international markets.

So what is it that the WTO has achieved? It has become only a dispute settlement body and even that role has been blocked by the US. Throughout

its existence, the WTO has been dominated by the developed countries, with US playing an important role. From supporting trade and investment liberalisation in the world and insisting on tariff reductions for prying open developing country markets, the US has now turned protectionist. It blocked the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement and renegotiated the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico in a bid to realise Trump's goal of America First. China has emerged as a supporter of globalisation and free trade as it still remains the biggest exporter in the world.

Way Forward

If the WTO shuts down, big players like China, the EU and Japan will rule the roost without legal restraints. Smaller countries will resort to protectionism which will reduce their volume of trade and income. The WTO has to reform itself, and have fair rules of trade for developing countries that do not interfere with their domestic policies.

Although WTO has not been very much successful in achieving its mandate still it can be credited for a rule based global trade. Therefore, it should be the utmost priority for the member countries to save the dispute settlement mechanism or in other words WTO. It is important that in the way forward, we take into account the aspirations of the large majority of the membership and re-double our efforts for an inclusive, transparent and development-oriented agenda.

General Studies Paper- II

Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.



4. INDIA - UK TIES : LOOKING FOR NEW DIMENSIONS

Why in News?

In recently held election in Britain, Boris Johnson defeated his nearest rival and Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Johnson's victory over Corbyn is good news for India for many reasons. Both British leaders have a stark difference in the way they view India and its global positioning.

Introduction

At its annual conference in Brighton in September, the Labour Party had approved a resolution criticising India's decision to change the constitutional position of Kashmir, expressing support for the Kashmiri "right to self-determination" and calling for "international intervention" and "mediation" between Delhi and Islamabad. India reacted sharply to the resolution and the High Commission in London conveyed its dismay and disapproval to India's friends in the Labour Party.

As Labour's unhelpful tone carried over to the Party's election manifesto that followed a few weeks later, Delhi knew that dealing with a Labour government, whose return to power seemed a serious possibility then, would be a major headache. Meanwhile, nearly 130 Indian community organisations in Britain sent strong messages of protests to the Labour Party, and as the elections approached, the diaspora seemed ready to shed its traditional preference for Labour. The Labour Party's hostility towards India on the question of Kashmir, and its political tilt towards Pakistan under Corbyn, galvanised a large section of the Indian diaspora to rally behind the Tories. While Delhi welcomes the return of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister of Britain, it knows that there is much distance to cover

before problems with London on Kashmir and Pakistan are overcome.

Given this political and diplomatic background, it is necessary to reboot India-UK relations. Boris Johnson's victory gives right and immediate opportunity to do so. In the backdrop of Brexit, the UK will need to build relationships outside the EU, for which it needs to become more open to overseas workers, students and tourists from countries like India. First, in all probability, the UK will come out of its Brexit "to be or not to be" dilemma very soon and settle the issue by 31 January 2020. Second, there is an urgent need for a section of the British establishment to shred its colonial mindset and de-hyphenate India and Pakistan. Once this is done, both the countries can find new ways to collaborate, not only on bilateral ties but also on global affairs.

Why Boris Victory Good for India-UK Ties?

Here are some issues on the basis of which India would be happy with Boris returning as British Prime Minister.

Brexit: Johnson is committed to implementing Brexit, a move that is likely to change Indo-UK trade relations. The Conservatives have been putting across to India that if Brexit happens, they will be free from the European laws and can have special trading arrangements with India. New Delhi can have a special treaty and tariff arrangements with the UK, which will be good for India's exports and joint ventures.

Indo-UK Trade: On the economic front, the disappointment is that Indo-UK trade has not done so well in recent years. "But the hope is that if Britain gets rid of European laws, it will have more flexibility in striking a good free

trade deal with India. It will be better for India if Britain gets out of the EU because European trade rules are very restrictive, this is the reason why for almost eight years India has tried to negotiate free trade agreement but it hasn't succeeded yet. In terms of our currency trade, investment and banking, it will be good to have stronger relations with Britain.

UK on Article 370: After India scrapped special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370, the United Kingdom chose to remain silent knowing fully well that it was an internal matter. Compare this with Jeremy Corbyn's hardened stand and antagonistic move of passing a resolution seeking "international intervention in Kashmir and a call for United Nations (UN) led-referendum". Corbyn again brought back Kashmir in his manifesto. All this backfired in the election as the influential Indian diaspora expressed "deep dismay" over the position taken by Corbyn and threatened to cut all ties with his Labour Party.

Boris backs India: Following India's move on Kashmir, there were some orchestrated protests against India and its High Commission in London. The British government was strongly criticised for allowing Pakistan-backed forces to build anti-India sentiments. Responding to New Delhi's concern, Boris made it clear that he was not 'anti-Hindu' and rejected 'anti-India' sentiments in the UK.

India's Representation in Britain: Boris had many influential ministers in his cabinet. Further in new cabinet also there will be a fairly strong representation of British Indians with good portfolios. The Indian Diaspora in UK is one of the largest ethnic minority communities in the country, with the 2011 census recording approximately

1.5 million people of Indian origin in the UK equating to almost 1.8 percent of the population and contributing 6% of the country's GDP.

Indian Students: Boris has a liberal approach when it comes to education in the UK. His government recently announced a new two-year post-study work visa for students, a move that addressed a long-standing demand to boost Indian student numbers at select British universities. According to the latest report, there has been a 63 per cent increase in the number of visas issued to Indians for study in the UK in just one year.

Cultural Ties: Cultural ties are perhaps one of the strongest features of the UK-India relationship reflecting the UK's soft power. Tourist numbers are high both ways. In 2017 almost one million Britons visited India, third after Bangladesh and the United States. Less than 350,000 Canadians were in fourth place. For Indian tourists, the UK is the fifth most-popular destination, and numbers are only going to grow. Education links too are strong: by 2021 the UK-India Newton-Bhabha programme will provide more than £400m on joint research and innovation.

Indian Diaspora in Geopolitics

Whether or not the Indian diaspora made a decisive difference to the overall electoral outcome in favour of Johnson, there is no doubt that Labour's Kashmir policy helped unite the Indian community in Britain. At nearly 1.4 million, the Indian diaspora in Britain is one of the largest and its contributions to civic life economic, political and social have steadily grown over the decades.

While the Indian diaspora might have tasted the first political fruits of its assertion, it is only now that it is emerging as an assertive force. However, the major issues, that are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

- ◆ First, whether it wants or not, India is being sucked into an unfortunate competition with Pakistan in diaspora mobilisation in the United Kingdom and beyond. Pakistan may have every reason to extend and deepen its sphere of contestation with India into the domestic politics of the Anglo-Saxon world. While Delhi needs to fend off Pakistan's tactics, it should avoid the danger of turning this competition with Pakistan as the central preoccupation in dealing with the West and its domestic opinion.
- ◆ Second, while the Indian diaspora outnumbers the Pakistani diaspora, India may find it increasingly hard to cope with the larger alliances that are beginning to coalesce and question India's current domestic policies. The new coalitions bind the Pakistani diaspora with the broader communities of Muslim organisations and human rights groups. Delhi will also need to reassure a lot of friendly constituencies in the West that are concerned about the nature of recent developments in India.
- ◆ Third, and more specifically, India has dealt with the British problem on the Kashmir question for decades now under different governments, both Labour and Conservative. Conservative prime ministers before Johnson, most notably David Cameron, sought to move Britain decisively away from Labour's tilt towards Pakistan on Kashmir. But it has been a lot harder to change the attitudes of the British establishment or the "deep state".

It is useful to remember that Delhi's most recent political spat with London was under the Conservative government of Boris Johnson. It was over the British role in the United Nations Security Council discussions

that followed Delhi's decision to alter the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir in August. The scrap certainly ended in Delhi's favour, but the structural problem certainly endures.

India-UK Bilateral Economic Relations

India is the world's fifth-largest economy and is set to become the third-largest by 2030, providing British businesses ample opportunities to expand and invest. In the long-term, the size of the Indian market, the growing workforce, and the improving education and health indicators mean that India will remain an attractive destination for British trade and investment. UK-India business relations in areas such as the defence and insurance sectors are catalysing more UK investment to India, stimulating growth, and creating good quality jobs.

- ◆ The UK businesses have invested some \$26.7 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) alone over the past years. The figure is higher than that of the US, Germany and France's industries combined. Between 2015-2018, the total trade between the UK and India has increased by 27 per cent.
- ◆ Trade between the two countries totalled over £20bn last year, an increase of 13.6 per cent compared with 2017, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data.
- ◆ The UK exports to India increased by 19.3 per cent between 2017 and 2018, amounting to £8bn in total.
- ◆ India's exports to the UK grew from \$2.2bn in 2001 to \$6.7bn in 2017, where as Indian shipments to Britain touched \$9.8bn in 2018, a rise of three per cent.
- ◆ India has maintained a trade surplus with the UK, with total exports at \$9.78bn and imports at \$7.05bn in 2018, according to official figures.

A Strategic Overview of UK-India Relations

Despite India's economic relations with UK being right on track, the emergence of newer superpowers and political uncertainties have weakened the UK's standing, potentially resulting in India gaining an upper hand.

Occasionally mooted as a vital partner for a new Global Britain, there was little sense of what the UK-India partnership would look like in practise. In part, this reflects the lack of clarity regarding the UK's relationship with Europe. Until that is settled, the approach to countries like India will remain secondary.

In parallel, few in India were mulling over the future relationship with the PM Modi's first term was very much focussed on India's internal development. Foreign policy involved deepening engagement with the Indian Diaspora—including in the UK; regional engagement for mutual benefit—notably improving ties with Bangladesh not least as a means of improving North East India's economic outlook; projecting strength against Pakistan, and to a lesser extent China. Beyond that, on "global challenges", such as the trade dispute between the US and China, India's approach was to try and sit it out, rather than actively taking sides.

Although, India's main foreign policy focus is in and around its neighbourhood, Mauritius may well prove to be a spanner in the works for the UK-India relationship. The dispute between the UK and Mauritius over the sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory—leased to the US until 2036—threatens to turn an asset into a liability. The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly backed Mauritius in its claim and, while non-enforceable, a continued dispute is likely to hinder the UK in positioning itself in the Indian Ocean region. Ironically, a recent

agreement between the US and India provided the Indian navy access to the base, but India appears for now to be siding with Mauritius.

More generally, the re-surfacing of a colonial legacy plays badly for the UK. While the prevailing opinion in India may well be to look forward rather than back, that the UK was the colonial power rather than, say, France, explains the presence of the India Diaspora in the UK but probably gives France an advantage all other things being equal.

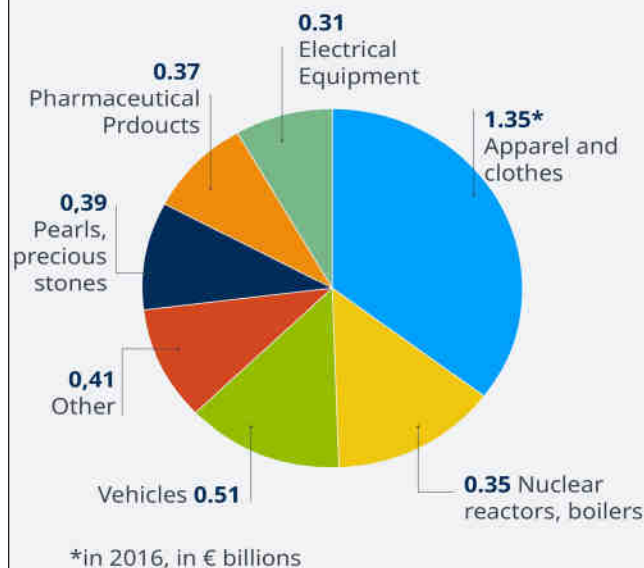
Western countries and India frequently diverge in international forums, such as the United Nations. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, international norms were generally set by the West, reflecting the economic dominance of the US and Europe, along with Japan. While not all countries obeyed all of the rules, it was clear where power lay. The emergence of new economic power centres—notably China—has made such rule-making harder. This trend has been facilitated by a more protectionist US, less committed to the trans-Atlantic alliance, and European weakness, most notably as a result of Brexit.

Way Forward

India and the United Kingdom share a modern partnership bound by strong historical ties. India, historically, has pleaded exceptionalism or ended up acting as a rules-taker. A post-Brexit trade deal between India and UK is on the agenda, especially with New Delhi no longer part of the RCEP. India can also benefit a lot with more cooperation in technology and education with Britain.

Indian trade with Britain

Types of Indian exports to the UK



*in 2016, in € billions

Source: UK India Business Council

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But as multi-polarity takes hold, it seems likely that India may be better placed to assert itself more actively than the UK, whose ability to write the rules will, by definition, be less. But this highlights the benefits of technical cooperation in evolving issues such as Internet governance, cybersecurity or terrorism.

Therefore, Delhi must now focus on the new possibilities with Britain presented by Boris Johnson's victory. For Delhi, this can't be about a tactical play on Kashmir with Britain; nor should it be about Boris Johnson's personal commitment to improving relations with India. For India, the question is about taking full advantage of the historic shift in Britain's international orientation — economic and political — that is about to unfold.

General Studies Paper- II

Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

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5. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX, 2019 : AN OVERVIEW

Why in News?

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has released its latest human development index (HDI) report 2019. The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. As far as India is concerned, HDI 2019 ranked India at the 129th position, one rank above last year's ranking, out of a total 189 countries.

Introduction

HDI is a composite index focusing on three basic dimensions of human development: the ability to lead a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth; the ability to acquire knowledge, measured by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and the ability to achieve a decent standard of living, measured by gross national income per capita. To measure human development more comprehensively, the Human Development Report presents four other composite indices. The inequality-adjusted HDI discounts the HDI according to the extent of inequality. The gender development index compares female and male HDI values. The gender inequality index highlights women's empowerment. And the multidimensional poverty index measures non-income dimensions of poverty.

New Framework of Analysis

The recent report builds on a new framework of analysis that looks at inequalities by going beyond income, beyond averages and beyond today.

Beyond Income: Any comprehensive assessment of inequality must consider income and wealth. But it must also go beyond

dollars and rupees to understand differences in other aspects of human development and the processes that lead to them. There is economic inequality, of course, but there are also inequalities in key elements of human development such as health, education, dignity and respect for human rights. And these might not be revealed by considering income and wealth inequality alone. A human development approach to inequality takes a people-centred view: It is about people's capabilities to exercise their freedoms to be and do what they aspire to in life.

Beyond Averages: Too often the debate about inequality is oversimplified, relying on summary measures of inequality and incomplete data that provide a partial—sometimes misleading—picture, both in the sorts of inequality to consider and the people affected. The analysis must go beyond averages that collapse information on distribution to a single number and look at the ways inequality plays out across an entire population, in different places and over time. For every aspect of human development, what matters is the entire inequality gradient (the differences in achievements across the population according to different socio-economic characteristics).

Beyond Today: Much analysis focuses on the past or on the here and now. But a changing world requires considering what will shape inequality in the future. Existing—and new—forms of inequality will interact with major social, economic and environmental forces to determine the lives of today's young people and their children. Two seismic shifts will shape the 21st century: Climate change and technological transformations. The climate crisis is already hitting the poorest hardest, while technological advances such as machine learning

and artificial intelligence can leave behind entire groups of people, even countries—creating the spectre of an uncertain future under these shifts.

Key Messages of the HDI 2019

- I. **Disparities in human development remain widespread, despite achievements in reducing extreme deprivations:** The 21st century has witnessed great progress in living standards, with an unprecedented number of people around the world making a "great escape" from hunger, disease and poverty—moving above minimum subsistence. The HDI shows impressive improvement on average, reflecting dramatic improvements in achievements such as life expectancy at birth, driven largely by sharp declines in infant mortality rates.
Still, many people have been left behind, and inequalities remain widespread across all capabilities. Some refer to life and death, others to access to knowledge and life-changing technologies. The world is not on track to eradicate them by 2030, as called for in the Sustainable Development Goals.
- II. **A new generation of inequalities is emerging, with divergence in enhanced capabilities, despite convergence in basic capabilities:** A new generation of severe inequalities in human development is emerging, even if many of the unresolved inequalities of the 20th century are declining. Under the shadow of the climate crisis and sweeping technological change, inequalities in human development are taking new forms in the 21st century. Inequalities in capabilities are evolving in different ways. Inequalities in basic capabilities—linked to the most extreme

deprivations—are shrinking. In some cases, quite dramatically, such as global inequalities in life expectancy at birth. Many people at the bottom are now reaching the initial stepping stones of human development. At the same time, inequalities are increasing in enhanced capabilities—which reflect aspects of life likely to become more important in the future, because they will be more empowering. People well empowered today appear set to get even farther ahead tomorrow.

III. Inequalities accumulate through life, often reflecting deep power imbalances: Inequalities in human development can accumulate through life, frequently heightened by deep power imbalances. They are not so much a cause of unfairness as a consequence, driven by factors deeply embedded in societies, economies and political structures.

- ♦ **Lifelong Disadvantage:** Inequalities can start before birth, and many of the gaps may compound over a person's life. When that happens, it can lead to persistent inequalities. This can happen in several ways, especially in the nexus among health, education and parents' socio-economic status.
- ♦ **Power Imbalances:** Income and wealth inequalities are often translated into political inequality, in part because inequalities depress political participation, giving more space to particular interest groups to shape decisions in their favour. Those privileged can capture the system, moulding it to fit their preferences, potentially leading to even more inequalities. Power asymmetries can even lead to breakdowns in institutional functions, weakening the effectiveness of policies.

- ♦ **Gender Inequality:** Gender disparities are among the most entrenched forms of inequality everywhere. Because these disadvantages affect half the world, gender inequality is one of the greatest barriers to human development. Gender inequality is complex, with differing progress and regress from place to place and issue to issue. Awareness has increased through the #MeToo movement, or the #NiUnaMenos movement, which shined a spotlight on violence against women. And girls around the world have been catching up on some of the basics, such as enrolment in primary school. But there is less to celebrate about progress beyond these fundamentals.

IV. Assessing and responding to inequalities in human development demands a revolution in metrics: Existing standards and practices for measuring inequality are inadequate to inform public debate or to support decisionmaking. Part of the challenge is the sheer number of different ways to understand inequality. To highlight a few:

- ♦ There are inequalities among groups (horizontal inequalities) and among individuals (vertical inequalities).
- ♦ There are inequalities between and within countries, which can follow different dynamics.
- ♦ There are intrahousehold inequalities (for instance, in 30 Sub-Saharan countries roughly three-quarters of underweight women and undernourished children are not in the poorest 20 percent of households, and around half are not in the poorest 40 percent). A new generation of metrics is needed to fill the many data gaps to measure these different

inequalities and, more generally, to go systematically beyond averages.

V. We can redress inequalities if we act now, before imbalances in economic power are politically entrenched: Every society has choices about the levels and kinds of inequalities it tolerates. That is not to say that tackling inequality is easy. Effective action must identify drivers of inequality, which are likely complex and multifaceted, often related to prevailing power structures that the people currently holding sway may not wish to change.

Redressing inequalities in human development in the 21st century is possible—if we act now, before imbalances in economic power translate into entrenched political dominance. Improvements in inequality for some basic capabilities show that progress is possible.

Other Important but Ignored Factors

The policies in all countries will have to confront two trends that are shaping inequalities in human development everywhere: climate change and accelerating technological progress.

Climate Change and Inequalities in Human Development: Inequality and the climate crisis are interwoven—from emissions and impacts to policies and resilience. Countries with higher human development generally emit more carbon per person and have higher ecological footprints overall. Climate change will hurt human development in many ways beyond crop failures and natural disasters. Between 2030 and 2050 climate change is expected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths a year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress. Hundreds of millions more people could be exposed to deadly heat by 2050, and the geographic range for disease vectors—such as mosquitoes

that transmit malaria or dengue—will likely shift and expand.

The overall impact on people will depend on their exposure and their vulnerability. Both factors are intertwined with inequality in a vicious circle.

Harnessing Technological Progress to Reduce Inequalities in Human Development: Technological change has been disruptive before, and much can be learned from the past. One key lesson is to ensure that major innovative disruptions help everyone, which requires equally innovative policies and perhaps new institutions. The current wave of technological progress will require other changes, including stronger antitrust policies and laws to govern the ethical use of data and artificial intelligence. Many of these will require international cooperation to succeed.

Technological change does not occur in a vacuum but is shaped by economic and social processes. It is an outcome of human action. Policymakers can shape the direction of technological change in ways that enhance human development. For instance, artificial intelligence might replace tasks performed by people, but it can also reinstate demand for labour by creating new tasks for humans, leading to a net positive effect that can reduce inequalities.

HDI 2019 and India

India has climbed one spot to 129 among 189 countries in the latest human development index.

- ◆ Between 1990 and 2018, India's HDI value increased by 50 per cent (from 0.431 to 0.647), which places it above the average for countries in the medium human development group (0.634) and above the average for other South Asian countries (0.642). This means that in the last three decades, life expectancy at birth in India increased by 11.6 years, whereas

the average number of schooling years increased by 3.5 years. Per capita incomes increased 250 times.

- ◆ However, for inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI), India's position drops by one position to 130, losing nearly half the progress (.647 to .477) made in the past 30 years. The IHDI indicates percentage loss in HDI due to inequalities.
- ◆ Around 661 million of these poor people live in Asia and the Pacific, of which India is a part. South Asia, of which India is the largest country, constitutes 41 per cent of the world's poor.
- ◆ India is only marginally better than the South Asian average on the Gender Development Index (0.829 vs 0.828), and ranks at a low 122 (of 162) countries on the 2018 Gender Inequality Index.
- ◆ Today, India is no longer a country languishing largely in extreme poverty. It is a country with pervasive inequality, pockets of deep deprivations and vulnerable populations. India is, of course, pivotal to the world's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. To achieve the SDGs, India must recognise existing inequality and continuously eliminate the structural factors that create inequality.

Way Forward

The HDI 2019 argued that tackling inequalities is possible. But it is not easy. It requires clarifying which inequalities matter to the advancement of human development and better understanding the patterns of inequality and what drives them. It urged everyone to recognize that the current, standard measures to account for inequality are imperfect and often misleading—because they are centred on income and are too opaque to illuminate the underlying mechanisms generating inequalities. There is still

Key Highlights of HDI 2019

- Norway, Switzerland, Ireland occupied the top three positions in that order. Germany is placed fourth along with Hong Kong, and Australia secured the fifth rank on the global ranking.
- Among India's neighbours, Sri Lanka (71) and China (85) are higher up the rank scale while Bhutan (134), Bangladesh (135), Myanmar (145), Nepal (147), Pakistan (152) and Afghanistan (170) were ranked lower on the list.
- South Asia was the fastest growing region in human development progress witnessing a 46% growth over 1990-2018, followed by East Asia and the Pacific at 43%.
- The group-based inequalities persist, especially affecting women and girls and no place in the world has gender equality. In the Gender Inequality Index (GII), India is at 122 out of 162 countries. Neighbours China (39), Sri Lanka (86), Bhutan (99), Myanmar (106) were placed above India.
- The report notes that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 as per the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. It forecasts that it may take 202 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity — one of the three indicators of the GII.

time to act. But the clock is ticking. What to do to address inequalities in human development is ultimately for each society to determine. That determination will emerge from political debates that can be charged and difficult. This Report contributes to those debates by presenting facts on inequalities in human development, interpreting them through the capabilities approach and proposing ideas to reduce them over the course of the 21st century.

General Studies Paper- II

Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/ Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger.



6. AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES IN INDIA : NEED OF THE HOUR

Why in News?

Recently, Vice President of India has stressed on the need for agro-based industries and other non-farm avenues to achieve the goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

Introduction

Economic policies of developing nations have always advocated enhancing farmers' income through product and productivity growth and by systematic value addition in agri-products through processing and manufacturing. India's 54.6 per cent population is still engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Indian farmers are largely unorganized. They rely on external agencies for disposal of their marketable surplus. Lack of capital asset endowments in rural areas compels them to sell their produce at throw away prices to the middlemen/commission agents. Low income from the primary farm produce and lack of investment in the processing and agri-value chain has caused rapid reduction in farm profits and the farm occupation has now come under severe pressure.

Development of agro-based industries has the propensity to stabilize and make agriculture acceptable and lucrative. An omnibus expression— 'agro-industry' covers a variety of industrial, processing and manufacturing activities based on agricultural raw materials and also those activities and services that come back to agriculture as inputs.

Agriculture provides inputs to the industry and Industrial outputs are used in agriculture to expand its production and productivity base. Thus, agro-industry encompasses not only the activities that utilize raw materials sourced from agriculture, but also those that provide inputs for modern agronomic practices.

Based on the input-output linkages and the interdependence between agriculture and industry, agro-industries can be of two types — (a) processing industries or agro-based industries and (b) input supply industries or agro-industries. The agencies supporting agriculture by way of designing and manufacturing inputs for production and productivity growth of the primary sector are termed as agro Industries whereas agro-based industries process and add value to such agri-resources which contain ground and tree crops, fruits and vegetables, etc., as well as livestock for their day-to-day operations. As per the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) framework, agro-based industry consists of the manufacturing/processing of food and beverages, textile, footwear and apparel, leather, rubber, paper and wood and tobacco products.

Scope of Agro-based Industries in India

India has the world's 10th largest arable land, 20 agro-climatic regions and 15 major climates. Census data indicates that the total number of cultivators in the country has decreased from 127.3 million in 2001 to 118.8 million in 2011. This may be due to excessive product orientation of Indian agriculture with inadequate focus on value addition, wastage reduction and incremental income through agri-processing and manufacturing.

Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology (CIPHET) of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has reported, in its 2015 report entitled "Assessment of Quantitative Harvest and Post-Harvest Losses of Major Crops and Commodities in India", that the harvest & post-harvest

losses for agriculture commodities range from 4.65—5.99 per cent for cereals, 6.36—8.41 percent for pulses, 3.08—9.96 per cent for oilseeds, 6.7—15.88 per cent for fruits and 4.58—12.44 per cent for vegetables. The total estimated economic value of quantitative loss was found to be Rs. 92651 crore at average annual prices of 2014. Thus, to reducing the extent of losses, promoting and adopting modern agro-processing technology and setting up of more numbers of agro-industries in rural areas are the need of the hour.

There is opportunity of an overall growth of agricultural economy as only 2 to 3 per cent of agri-commodities are processed. Considering the extant depressed price discovery scenario in the Indian agriculture, it is necessary to amply invest in rural areas so as to develop suitable processing and manufacturing infrastructure and to attract private public partnerships for setting up of modern agro-based industries in and around rural areas.

It can further play a strategic role in pro-poor growth strategies, particularly in developing countries like ours where even after the passage of 72 years of independence, a round 65 per cent of the poor live in rural areas.

As possibilities for income generation are restricted in rural areas, rural non-farm earnings from trading, agro-processing, manufacturing, commercial, and service activities constitute about 30 to 45 per cent of rural household income. The importance of agro-industry for employment is further emphasized by high and increasing levels of female involvement, especially in the non-traditional, high-value agro-chains (i.e. horticulture, fruits and fish products).

In addition, strong synergies exist between agro-industry, agriculture and poverty alleviation. Agro-industry provides capital and services to farmers (e.g. seeds and equipment, training, production and market information), promotes entrepreneurship, raises demand for agricultural products and connects farmers with markets through the handling, processing, marketing and distribution of agricultural products. As a result, productivity and quality of agricultural production, farm returns and economic stability for rural households, food security, and innovation throughout the value chain can be enhanced. Efficient agro-industry can therefore spur agricultural growth, and—accompanied by a strong link with small holders—reduce rural poverty, thus, essentially acting as a launching pad for the integration of our developing economy into global markets.

Agro-Based Industry: Characteristics

In India, the agro-based industries can be grouped under three categories viz. (a) Agri-processing units covering fruit and vegetable processing units, dairy plants, rice mills, dal mills, etc.; (b) Agri-manufacturing units covering sugar, dairy, bakery, solvent extraction, textile units, etc.; (c) Agri-input manufacturing units covering mechanization of agriculture, agriculture implements, seed industries, irrigation equipment, fertilizer, pesticides, etc.

Rural and agro-based industries help create employment opportunity at production, distribution, manufacturing and marketing stages. Around 45.3 per cent of agro-based industries in 2017–18 shared only 24.1 per cent of the total net value addition even though 44.2 per cent of total workers were engaged in this sector. This shows that the agri-

based industrial scenario has not fully capitalized the benefits of the local available resources and the efforts of the government through various subsidy-oriented central schemes. There were a total of 1.07 lakh agri-based units in 2017–18.

The manufacturer of food products and beverages accounts for 38 per cent of the total number of agri-industries and shares 36.8 per cent of the total net value added. There lies a great potential to make agro-based industries more visible and remunerative by identifying and resolving impending issues in a time bound manner.

Challenges

Although, the government is facilitating agro-based industries through various schemes, some challenges are present. Key challenges are discussed below:

Unfair Trade Practices: Agro-based industries lose their competitive edge due to unfair trade practices adopted by exporters of other countries. Such practices manifest in the following two forms:

- ◆ **Dumping:** It is observed that exporters from other countries often dump their products in Indian markets at rates cheaper than those at which they sell their products in their domestic markets.
- ◆ **Subsidies:** Government of those countries from where imports are sourced by India, are observed to be providing subsidies to their exporters.

In both cases, the competitive scenario is distorted and the domestic industry is at a loss. The adverse impact on these industries can be in the form of loss of market share, increase in unsold stocks, reduction in return on capital employed, reduction in profits, increases in losses, increase in unemployment, closure of manufacturing units, etc. Another

related issue is that sometimes the cheap imports are found to be of low quality, thereby adding to environmental problems and hygiene related issues.

India's Customs Tariff Act, 1975 and related Anti-dumping Rules and CVD Rules, 1995 provide the legal backing for government of India to protect the domestic manufacturer against unfair trade practices of exporters of other countries.

Capital and Land: Capital is costliest in India. With rate of interest as high as 12 per cent, many industries cannot afford to borrow capital. Further, land acquisition of land is also a difficult process in India.

Labour Laws: As far as labour laws are concerned, Indian laws are highly restrictive and inflexible. World over including Bangladesh follows a 'hire and fire' policy but India does not allowing it. As a result, many textile industries shifted to Vietnam and Bangladesh and not India. Recently, 53 industries shifted out of China, of which, 23 shifted to Vietnam and 12 to Bangladesh and just two came to India.

Government's Initiatives

The government of India has been implementing several schemes for the development of agro-based industry in India. Key schemes are discussed below:

- ◆ The Finance Minister, while presenting Union Budget 2019 focused on reviving traditional industries, with a cluster-based approach, through the Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) for development of khadi, village industries, and coir clusters by providing them with improved equipment, common facilities centres, business development services, training, capacity building

and design, and marketing support, etc.

- ◆ Further, a Scheme for Promoting Innovation, Rural Industry & Entrepreneurship (ASPIRE) has been launched with an aim to create new jobs and reduce unemployment, promote entrepreneurship culture in India, boost grassroots economic development at the district level, facilitate innovative business solutions for unmet social needs, and promote innovation to further strengthen the competitiveness of the MSME sector.
- ◆ Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS) is again a facilitator of technology upgradation of small scale industries, including khadi, village, coir and other agro-industrial units, by providing 15 percent up front capital subsidy (limited to a maximum of Rs. 15 lakh) with the objective to upgrade plant and machinery of small enterprises with state-of-the-art technology and also for new MSMEs, which have set up their facilities with

appropriate, eligible and proven technology duly approved under scheme guidelines.

- ◆ The government of India has launched 'Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters)' with an allocation of Rs. 6000 crore for the period 2016–20. It is a comprehensive package which will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlets.

Way Forward

The agro-industries are getting even more important in view of very impressive growth in high value commodities alongside rising incomes in recent years. It has larger scope for acceleration in future given the thrust on doubling farmer's income. Further, turning agro and food processing industry into a major export industry can also create vast employment

opportunities for workers since it is a labour-intensive industry.

Agri-based industries conform to the notion of competitive advantage both within and outside the country. They can play a role of a safety valve to absorb surplus rural labour and can address the problem of large scale unemployment or disguised employment in rural areas. The real challenge here is how effectively the government implements its schemes and policy interventions so as to ensure an all-round industrial growth in rural areas without undermining the identity of village, its socio-economic structure, agri-production systems and the basic agri-manufacturing characteristics.

General Studies Paper- III

Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significant; location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

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7. SOVEREIGN DIGITAL CURRENCY AND INDIA

Context

Last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China should 'Seize Opportunity' to adopt Blockchain at the Political Bureau meeting of the Central Committee. The crypto community around the world celebrated this announcement as Bitcoin surged by over 40 percent – third highest single day rise in a decade since existence.

In a recent speech Max Levchin, Paypal co-founder held "If the US does not get its act together and fully digitize the dollar, we run the risk of letting China become the digital reserve currency of the world."

Background

Most experts believe that the recent Chinese Government announcement will pave the way for 'Digital Renminbi' which has been in the works for a few months ever since Facebook's announcement of 'Libra' – a price stable cryptocurrency backed by fiat reserves governed by the Libra Association. Soon after its whitepaper launch though, Libra was criticised around the world by politicians and bankers alike. It was stalled in the US for presumably making inroads into the sovereignty of their national currency. China on the other hand, is moving at breakneck speed by passing a cryptography law

that will come into effect on 1 January 2020.

For too long, the dollar has been unchallenged as the world's reserve currency giving the US leverage over the world's financial system and also enabling it to impose sanctions against countries. The recent trade war was a rude awakening for China which is now pushing for a more advanced financial system using Digital Renminbi.

As a new digital currency war between the East and West brews, India needs to take a progressive stand in order to counter the threat from the Digital Dollar and Digital Renminbi. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has

been skeptical about permission-less digital currencies like Bitcoin due to issues of money laundering and capital flight. While these are legitimate fears, the government's move to cut off the crypto community from the banking system and proposals to severely punish holders of cryptocurrencies has squashed any innovation in this space. Such adverse regulatory conditions have pushed Indian companies engaged in crypto currencies and cryptography research to move their operations abroad, while China has been strengthening its intellectual property – as of today, China holds over 71 patents for its Digital Renminbi project.

What is Digital Currency?

Digital currency is a type of currency available in digital form (in contrast to physical, such as banknotes and coins). It exhibits properties similar to physical currencies, but can allow for instantaneous transactions and borderless transfer-of-ownership. Examples include virtual currencies, cryptocurrencies, and central bank digital currency. Out of them the most talked one is cryptocurrency.

It is an internet-based medium of exchange which uses cryptographical functions to conduct financial transactions. Cryptocurrencies leverage blockchain technology to gain decentralization, transparency, and immutability.

The most important feature of a cryptocurrency is that it is not controlled by any central authority: the decentralized nature of the blockchain makes cryptocurrencies theoretically immune to the old ways of government control and interference. Cryptocurrencies can be sent directly between two parties via the use of private and public keys. These transfers can be done with minimal processing fees, allowing users to avoid the steep fees charged by traditional financial institutions.

Prospects of Digital Currency in India

With the effort of government and private entities like Reliance Jio adding 200 million new Internet users this year, India is poised to be the second-largest digital nation without

a strategic plan to counter the new digital currency threat. While, BHIM UPI crossed a billion transactions last month and has been an unprecedented success, from a technology standpoint, it is just a money transfer mechanism between banks using existing IMPS payment rails. What India needs is a new paradigm in banking, which can reinvent the age-old banking model and usher a new financial revolution by enabling new-age technology companies to participate in providing financial services to everyone. Just as China is pushing for the Digital Renminbi, India needs a Digital Rupee.

In the past, the RBI has encouraged innovation by allowing payment gateways, wallets, payment banks and finally BHIM UPI, which brought hundreds of millions of users into the mainstream economy. This 'cyclical disruption' created new category leaders in every cycle and provided incentives for companies to drive digital payments. Digital Rupee, built using blockchain technology, will encompass all these previous cycles, while also creating a framework for a 'Unified Banking Interface'. This new financial revolution using a Digital Rupee has the potential to dwarf the current fintech wave which in its current form resembles mobile phones before the launch of the iPhone.

But first, to understand the importance of a Digital Rupee, we must distinguish the digitalisation of fiat currency from digital currency. The digitisation of fiat currency stems from the advent of electronic payment and interbank IT systems, allowing commercial banks to more efficiently and independently generate the credit flows that expand broad money supply. By contrast, digital currency, enabled by blockchain technology, affects the base currency allowing the central bank to bypass commercial banks and regain control of currency creation and supply end-to-end.

India runs the risk of being caught up in the whirlwind of a proxy digital currency war as the US and China battle it out to gain supremacy across other markets by introducing new-age financial products. Today, a sovereign Digital Rupee isn't just a matter of financial innovation but represents a push back against the inevitable proxy war which threatens our national and financial security. This also provides an opportunity for India, which is poised to be the third-largest economy within a decade, to leapfrog and establish dominance of Digital Rupee as a superior currency for trade with its strategic partners, thereby reducing dependency on the dollar. India should expect significant friction from US and China as it climbs the charts towards economic and financial dominance and be prepared to counter it strategically.

Digital Rupee will not only make the merchant discount rate (MDR) debate obsolete (as payments and financial contracts will be built in) but also make cashbacks, remittances, loans, insurance, stocks and other financial products a natural extension using programmable smart contracts. It will reinvent the idea of a core banking system on the back of which Infosys and TCS became the world's largest software outsourcing giants. Today, fintech companies are restricted by what's allowed and possible with cosmetic changes to banking products with huge customer acquisition costs. Unlike current financial products that work in silos and create walled gardens, Digital Rupee will be programmable at its core with open source infrastructure. This will turn every large technology company into a fintech company without the need for permission or partnership with a bank. This shall result in unprecedented innovation by upending the existing banking model and creating new incentives for companies to bank the unbanked, while also providing financial services

to those who have been at the mercy of public sector banks till date.

RBI and Government Stand

The Reserve Bank of India maintained its hard-line stance on not allowing privately owned cryptocurrencies in India, but said that it would 'seriously' consider developing a sovereign digital currency when the time is 'appropriate'.

RBI has held several internal discussions and consulted with other central banks on possibility of launching India's own digital currency, but said that it would be improbable for any such project to take off in the immediate future given the existing level of technology at central bank's disposal. RBI governor Shaktikanta Das added that currency issuance is a sovereign mandate which will not be handed over to a private company. There are huge challenges around money laundering. The technology is still evolving and is at an incipient stage.

Central government's constituted panel headed by former Finance Secretary Subash Chandra Garg had recommended the government to make cryptocurrency trading in India illegal earlier this year. However, the report pointed that India could benefit from harnessing blockchain -- the underlying technology that powers cryptocurrencies -- and come with other usecases including a sovereign controlled digital currency.

Blueprint for the Future

As the government and the central bank take stock of the situation, they have two models to implement the Digital Rupee -- Private sector-led Libra or Central Bank-backed Digital Renminbi. While both models have their own advantages and disadvantages, the right model for India might be a combination of the two -- a Public Private Partnership (PPP). This would require public and private sector companies across Telecom, Retail, Technology and Financial services to come together and create a unified

Digital Rupee under the guidance of the central bank. As this is likely to be a strategic initiative, it would require the formation of an independent body similar to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to create the technology backbone and enable proliferation of the Digital Rupee with complete impartiality. The last thing such a strategic initiative needs is multiple attempts by private companies to create their own versions of the Digital Rupee.

While the RBI mulls over the Digital Rupee, it needs to realise that Digital Rupee empowers the central bank by providing them direct tools to control monetary policy and also helps them in safeguarding the interest of deposit holders. Directly influenced creation and supply flow using a Digital Rupee will immediately reflect the effects of policy changes instead of relying on commercial banks to make those changes when they deem fit. Most importantly, it will empower the regulators to monitor transactions and credit flow across the economy helping them weed out scams and fraud instantly and secure depositors' money. This is in sharp contrast to how the RBI currently monitors regulated entities with internal and external audits which in many cases are misreported, resulting in scams.

This is important as confidence in the banking system has been falling. In a recent report, McKinsey found that a majority of banks globally may not be economically viable adding that their business models are flawed, and the sense of urgency is acute. The recent NBFC crisis resulting in the current downturn in the economy and the PMC Bank scandal which has locked

out depositors from withdrawing their funds due to high NPAs are testament to the fragility of our current banking model and monetary policy.

Conclusion

With cash in circulation 20 percent higher since demonetisation, which was a move to fight black money and create a cashless economy, the Digital Rupee presents another shot at achieving the same goal. Digital payments in their current form are unable to compete with cash irrespective of the convenience they provide since cash is seen as a way to make completely private and immutable transactions. A radical approach towards opt-in privacy using zero knowledge proofs for transactions up to a certain limit, with a transaction tax built in, can create a digital cash equivalent which in its current form even Libra and Digital Renminbi will fail to achieve. The creation of a Digital Rupee is an opportunity for India to empower its citizens and enable them to use it freely in our ever-expanding digital economy and break free from an outdated banking system. It's time India considers Digital Rupee as a matter of national security and sovereignty.

General Studies Paper- III

Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.



SEVEN SUBJECTIVE QUESTIONS WITH MODEL ANSWERS

1. Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 : Inclusive or Exclusive

Q. What are the important provisions of Citizenship (Amendment) Act? Why the Act is facing opposition? Discuss.

Hints:

- ◆ It seeks to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955 and proposes to grant citizenship to the Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhist, Jains and Parsis who come to India after facing religious persecution from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh on or before December 31, 2014.
- ◆ Legal experts and Opposition leaders have argued that it violates the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India. One argument made in Parliament is that the law violates Article 14 that guarantees equal protection of laws. According to the legal test prescribed by Supreme Court, for a law to satisfy the conditions under Article 14, it has to first create a "reasonable class" of subjects that it seeks to govern under the law.
- ◆ Another argument is that the law does not account for other categories of migrants who may claim persecution in other countries. The law will not extend to those persecuted in Myanmar (Rohingya Muslims) and Sri Lanka (Tamils). Further, by not allowing Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims who face persecution in Pakistan, or the Hazras, Tajiks and Uzbeks who faced persecution by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the law is being seen as potentially violating Article 14.
- ◆ Further argument given against the amendment is that, although it does not exclude any Indian citizen. However, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the latest citizenship law cannot be decoupled. The final NRC left out over 19 lakh people. The new law gives a fresh chance to the Bengali Hindus left out to acquire citizenship, whereas the same benefit will not be available to a Muslim left out, who will have to fight a legal battle.
- ◆ The new Act has also polarised the North-east and triggered a process of social and political realignment in North-east region.

2. Extension of Creamy Layer Norm to SC/ST Reservation

Q. What is the concept of 'Creamy Layer' in reservation? Discuss the debate around extension of creamy layer norm to SC/STs reservation.

Hints:

- ◆ The concept has its genesis in a 1992 Supreme Court judgment in the Indira Sawhney vs Union of India case. Since then, two other significant Supreme Court judgments — one in M. Nagaraj vs Union of India and another in the Jarnail Singh case — have laid down the law in this regard.
- ◆ The 2006 Supreme Court judgment in M. Nagaraj vs Union of India, where a five-judge bench approved Parliament's decision to extend reservations for SCs and STs to include promotions. It required the government to provide proof for the backwardness of the class benefitting from the reservation, for its inadequate representation in the position/service for which reservation in promotion is to be granted and to show how reservations in promotions would further administrative efficiency. The judgment also held that the creamy layer concept was applicable to SCs and STs.
- ◆ In another Constitution bench judgment in the case of Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India (2008), the SC had reiterated the creamy layer test to be applied to OBCs in admissions to government universities as well as government-aided private universities. Then Chief Justice of India, K.G. Balakrishnan, had said emphatically that the creamy layer principle is inapplicable to SCs and STs because it is merely a principle of identification of the backward class and not applied as a principle of equality. The decision in Jarnail Singh case disagreed with the view of Chief Justice Balakrishnan.
- ◆ Reforms to reservation have become the need of the hour. It is time we transcend our selfish interests and advocate a rethinking of reservation that is more inclusive. We need fresh dialogue and thinking on reservation. Including the excluded will be the real tribute to the Constitution of India.

3. World Trade Organisation : Becoming Dysfunctional

Q. Although WTO has not been very much successful in achieving its mandate still it can be credited for a rule based global trade. Discuss.

Hints:

- ◆ The highest adjudicating body for resolving global trade disputes at the World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute settlement system could become dysfunctional on December 11, as the United States (US) continues to play hardball by adopting intransigent positions.
- ◆ The WTO was losing its essential focus on negotiations and was becoming a litigation centred organisation which has some truth to it. It is true that the trading arrangements between countries is increasingly bypassing the WTO and formulating their own agreements.
- ◆ The US believes the WTO is biased against it, and has criticised it for being "unfair". The administration of President Donald Trump has, therefore, taken the decision to starve the body of personnel and to disregard its authority — imposing new tariffs on not just China, but also American allies such as Canada, Europe, and Japan.
- ◆ Although WTO has not been very much successful in achieving its mandate still it can be credited for a rule based global trade. Therefore, it should be the utmost priority for the member countries to save the dispute settlement mechanism or in other words WTO.

4. India - UK Ties : Looking for New Dimensions

Q. India must avoid making Pakistan a preoccupation in relationship with UK. It must take advantage of shift in Britain's international orientation. Discuss it with context of recently held elections in UK.

Hints:

- ◆ In recently held election in Britain, Boris Johnson defeated his nearest rival and Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Johnson's victory over Corbyn is good news for India for many reasons.
- ◆ India is being sucked into an unfortunate competition with Pakistan in diaspora mobilisation in the United Kingdom and beyond. Pakistan may have every reason to extend and deepen its sphere of contestation with India into the domestic politics of the Anglo-Saxon world. While Delhi needs to fend off Pakistan's tactics,

it should avoid the danger of turning this competition with Pakistan as the central preoccupation in dealing with the West and its domestic opinion.

- ◆ PM Modi's first term was very much focussed on India's internal development. Foreign policy involved deepening engagement with the Indian Diaspora—including in the UK; regional engagement for mutual benefit—notably improving ties with Bangladesh not least as a means of improving North East India's economic outlook; projecting strength against Pakistan, and to a lesser extent China. Beyond that, on "global challenges", such as the trade dispute between the US and China, India's approach was to try and sit it out, rather than actively taking sides.
- ◆ India and the United Kingdom share a modern partnership bound by strong historical ties. India, historically, has pleaded exceptionalism or ended up acting as a rules-taker. A post-Brexit trade deal between India and UK is on the agenda, especially with New Delhi no longer part of the RCEP. India can also benefit a lot with more cooperation in technology and education with Britain.

5. Human Development Index, 2019 : An Overview

Q. Evaluate the performance of India on Human Development Index, 2019.

Hints:

- ◆ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has released its latest human development index (HDI) report 2019. The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.
- ◆ India has climbed one spot to 129 among 189 countries in the latest human development index. Between 1990 and 2018, India's HDI value increased by 50 per cent (from 0.431 to 0.647), which places it above the average for countries in the medium human development group (0.634) and above the average for other South Asian countries (0.642). This means that in the last three decades, life expectancy at birth in India increased by 11.6 years, whereas the average number of schooling years increased by 3.5 years. Per capita incomes increased 250 times.
- ◆ India is only marginally better than the South Asian average on the Gender Development Index (0.829 vs 0.828), and ranks at a low 122 (of 162) countries on the 2018 Gender Inequality Index.

- ◆ Today, India is no longer a country languishing largely in extreme poverty. It is a country with pervasive inequality, pockets of deep deprivations and vulnerable populations. India is, of course, pivotal to the world's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. To achieve the SDGs, India must recognise existing inequality and continuously eliminate the structural factors that create inequality.

6. Agro-based Industries in India : Need of the Hour

Q. Describe the Scope of agro-based industries in India.

Hints:

- ◆ Development of agro-based industries has the propensity to stabilize and make agriculture acceptable and lucrative. An omnibus expression— 'agro-industry' covers a variety of industrial, processing and manufacturing activities based on agricultural raw materials and also those activities and services that come back to agriculture as inputs.
- ◆ India has the world's 10th largest arable land, 20 agro-climatic regions and 15 major climates. Census data indicates that the total number of cultivators in the country has decreased from 127.3 million in 2001 to 118.8 million in 2011. This may be due to excessive product orientation of Indian agriculture with inadequate focus on value addition, wastage reduction and incremental income through agri-processing and manufacturing.
- ◆ There is opportunity of an overall growth of agricultural economy as only 2 to 3 per cent of agri-commodities are processed. Considering the extant depressed price discovery scenario in the Indian agriculture, it is necessary to amply invest in rural areas so as to develop suitable processing and manufacturing infrastructure and to attract private public partnerships for setting up of modern agro-based industries in and around rural areas.
- ◆ As possibilities for income generation are restricted in rural areas, rural non-farm earnings from trading, agro-processing, manufacturing, commercial, and service activities constitute about 30 to 45 per cent of rural household income. The importance of agro-industry for employment is further emphasized by high and increasing levels of female involvement, especially in the non-traditional, high-value agro-chains (i.e. horticulture, fruits and fish products).
- ◆ Efficient agro-industry can therefore spur agricultural growth, and—accompanied by a strong link with small holders—reduce rural poverty, thus, essentially acting

as a launching pad for the integration of our developing economy into global markets.

7. Sovereign Digital Currency and India

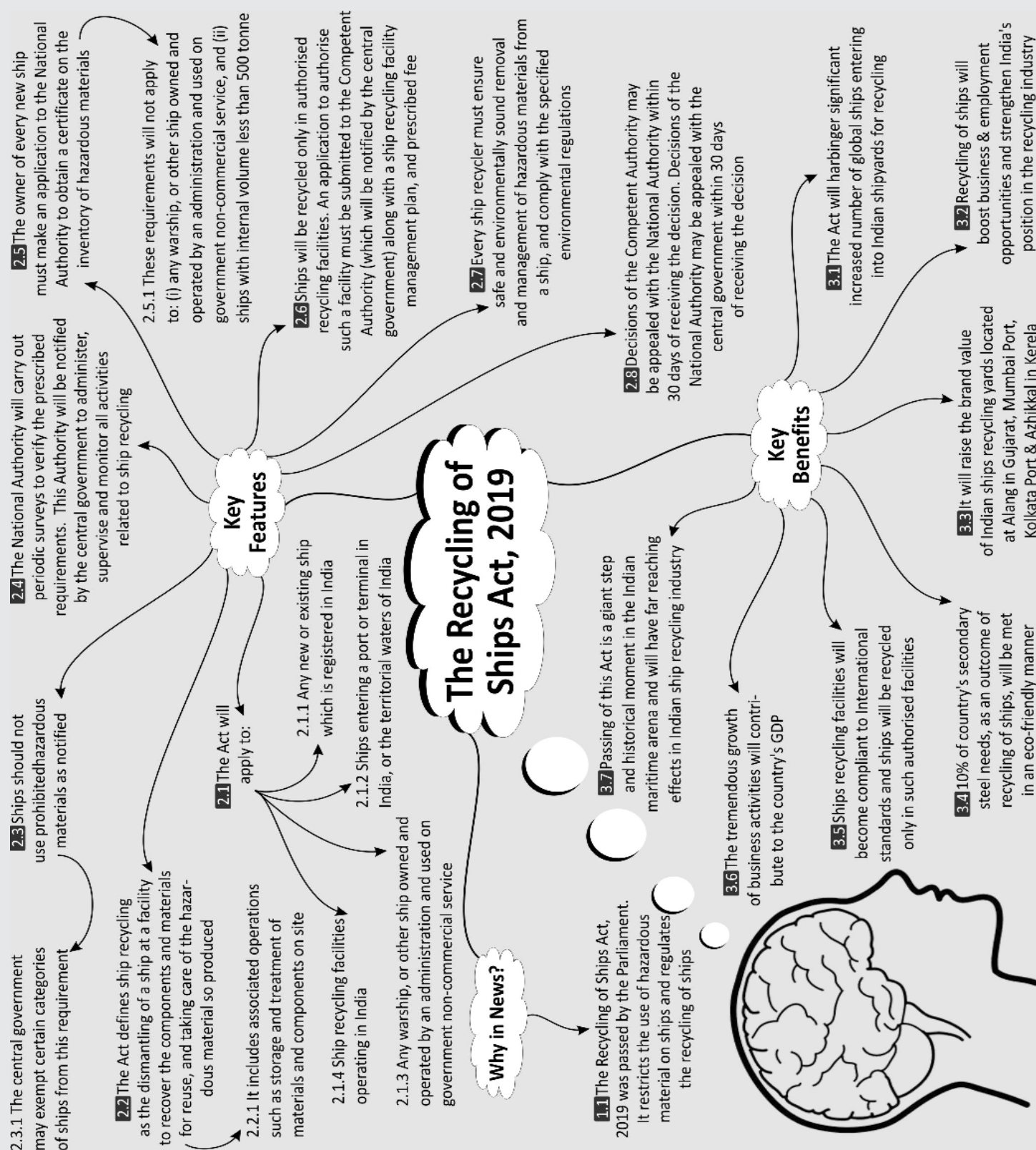
Q. Just as China is pushing for the Digital Renminbi, India needs a Digital Rupee. Do you agree? Give your opinion with reasons.

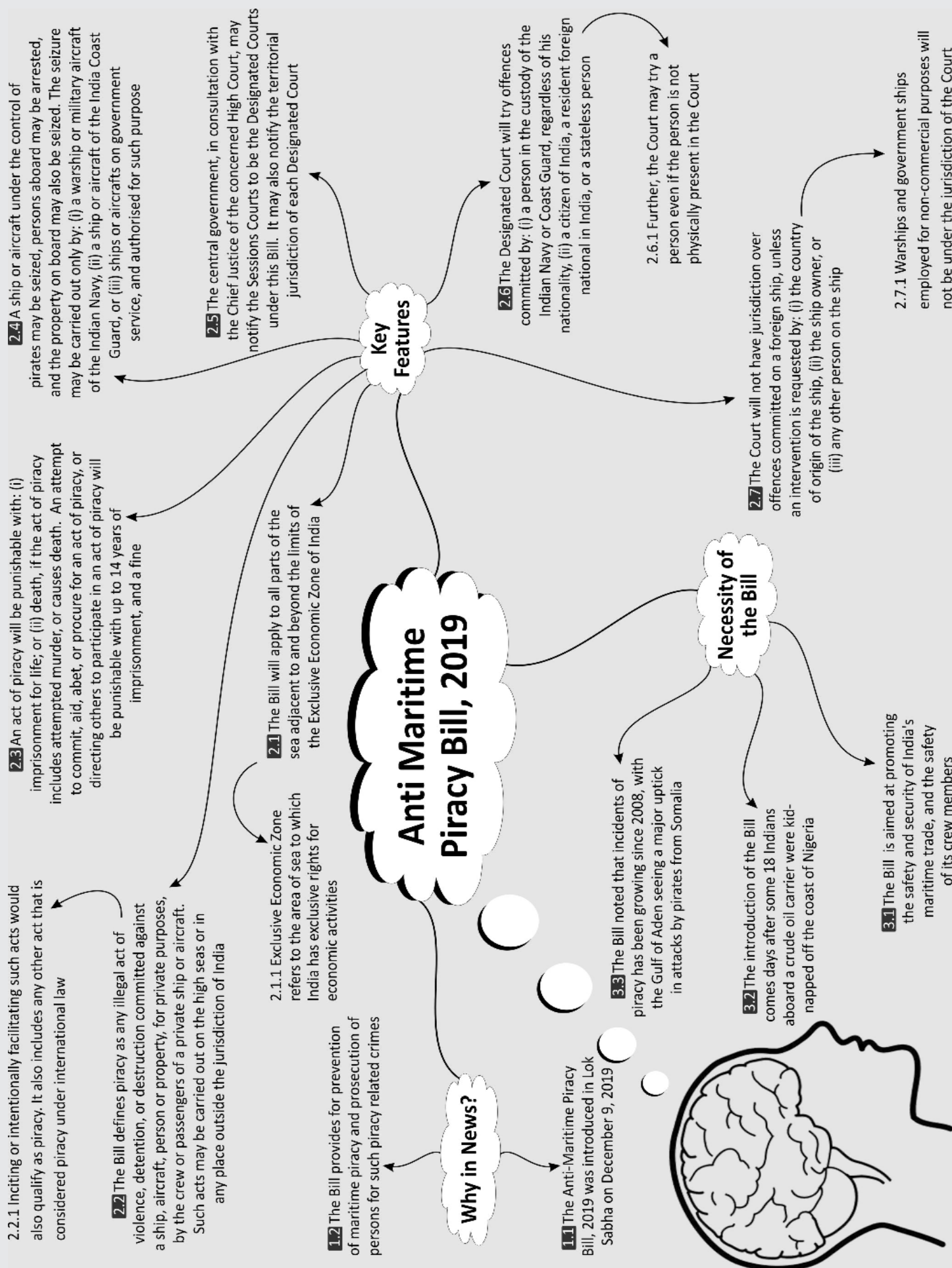
Hints:

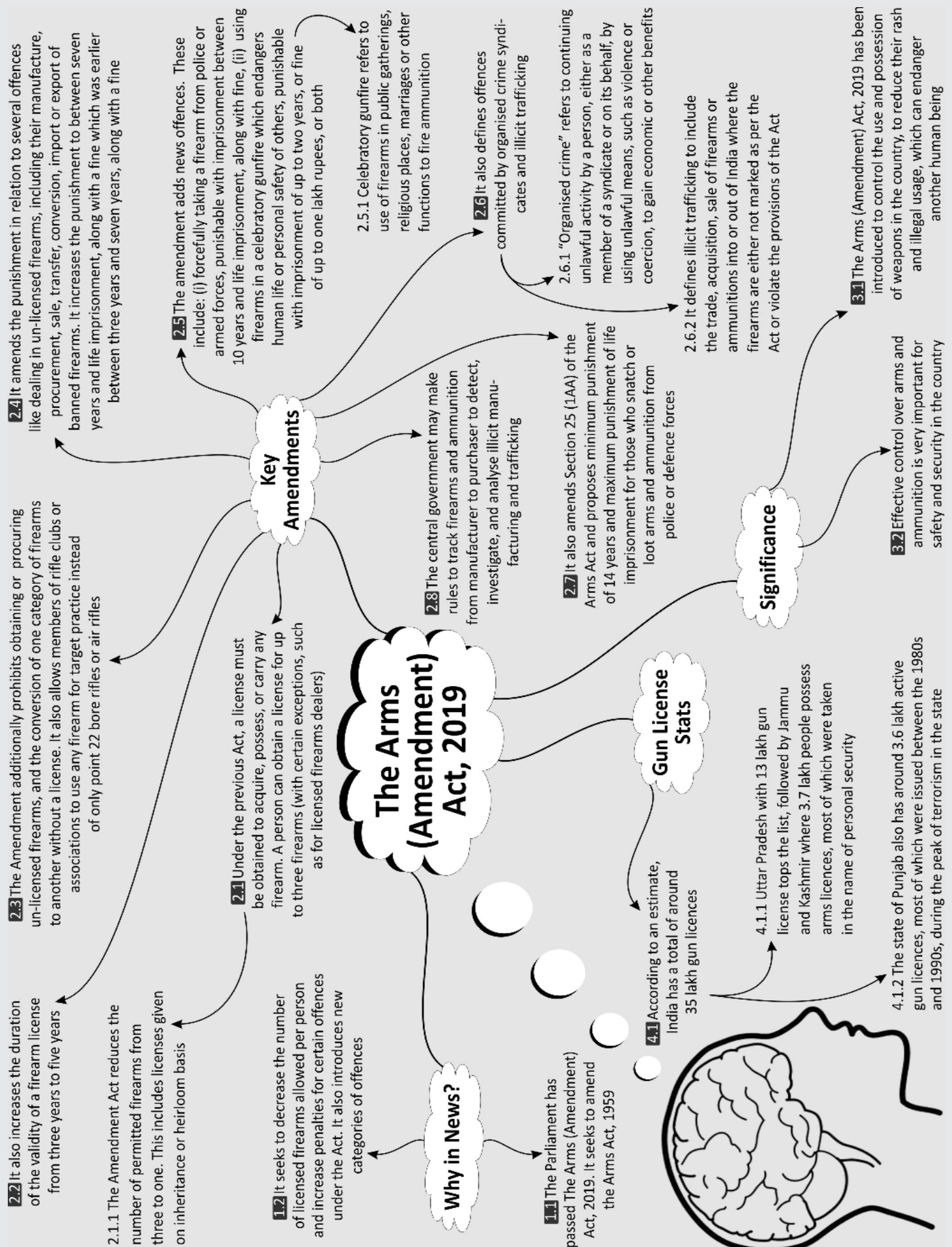
- ◆ Last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China should 'Seize Opportunity' to adopt Blockchain at the Political Bureau meeting of the Central Committee. The crypto community around the world celebrated this announcement as Bitcoin surged by over 40 percent – third highest single day rise in a decade since existence.
- ◆ India needs is a new paradigm in banking, which can reinvent the age-old banking model and usher a new financial revolution by enabling new-age technology companies to participate in providing financial services to everyone. Just as China is pushing for the Digital Renminbi, India needs a Digital Rupee.
- ◆ The importance of a Digital Rupee, we must distinguish the digitalisation of fiat currency from digital currency. The digitisation of fiat currency stems from the advent of electronic payment and interbank IT systems, allowing commercial banks to more efficiently and independently generate the credit flows that expand broad money supply. By contrast, digital currency, enabled by blockchain technology, affects the base currency allowing the central bank to bypass commercial banks and regain control of currency creation and supply end-to-end.
- ◆ Today, a sovereign Digital Rupee isn't just a matter of financial innovation but represents a push back against the inevitable proxy war which threatens our national and financial security. This also provides an opportunity for India, which is poised to be the third-largest economy within a decade, to leapfrog and establish dominance of Digital Rupee as a superior currency for trade with its strategic partners, thereby reducing dependency on the dollar.
- ◆ The creation of a Digital Rupee is an opportunity for India to empower its citizens and enable them to use it freely in our ever-expanding digital economy and break free from an outdated banking system. It's time India considers Digital Rupee as a matter of national security and sovereignty.

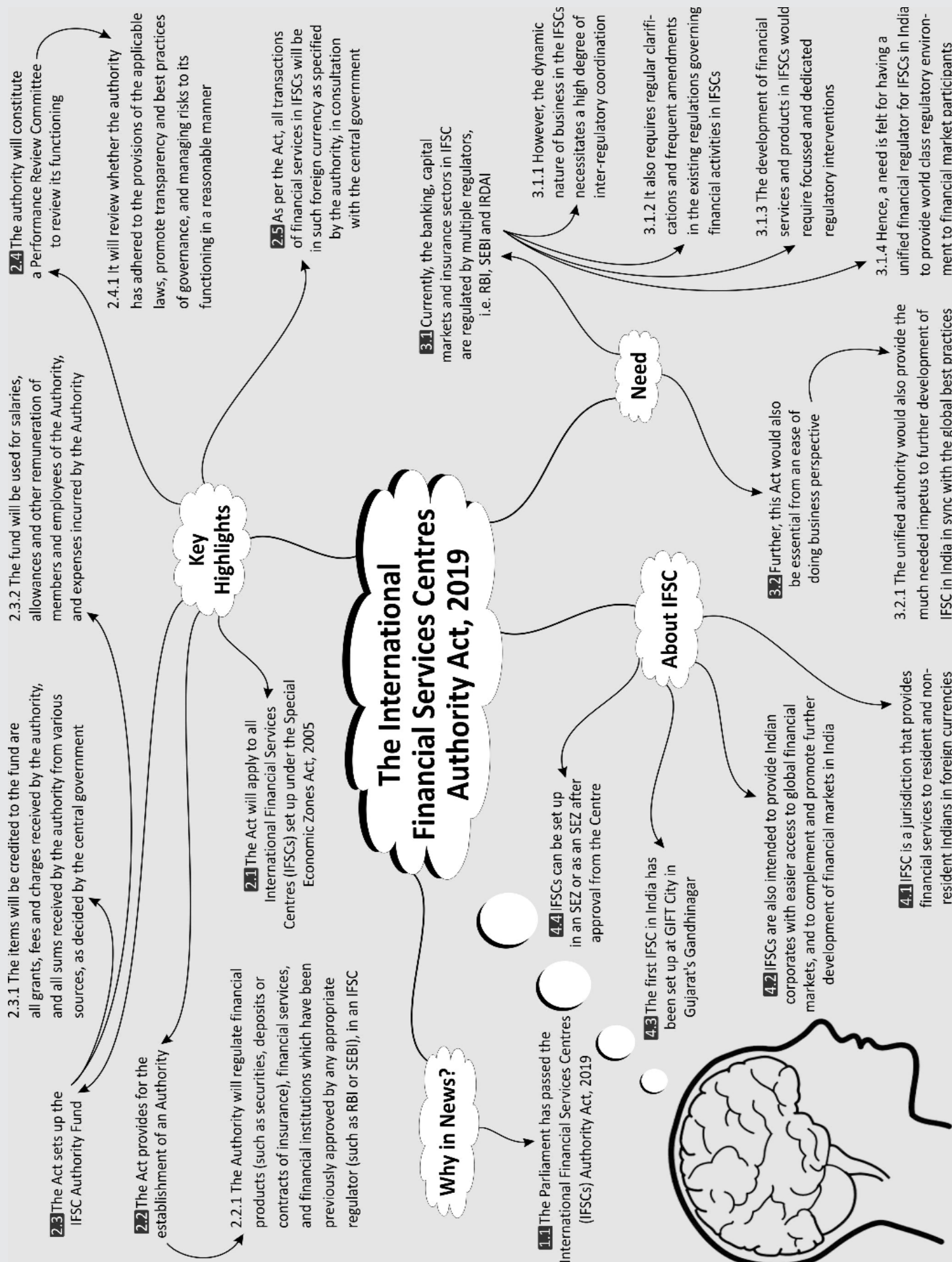
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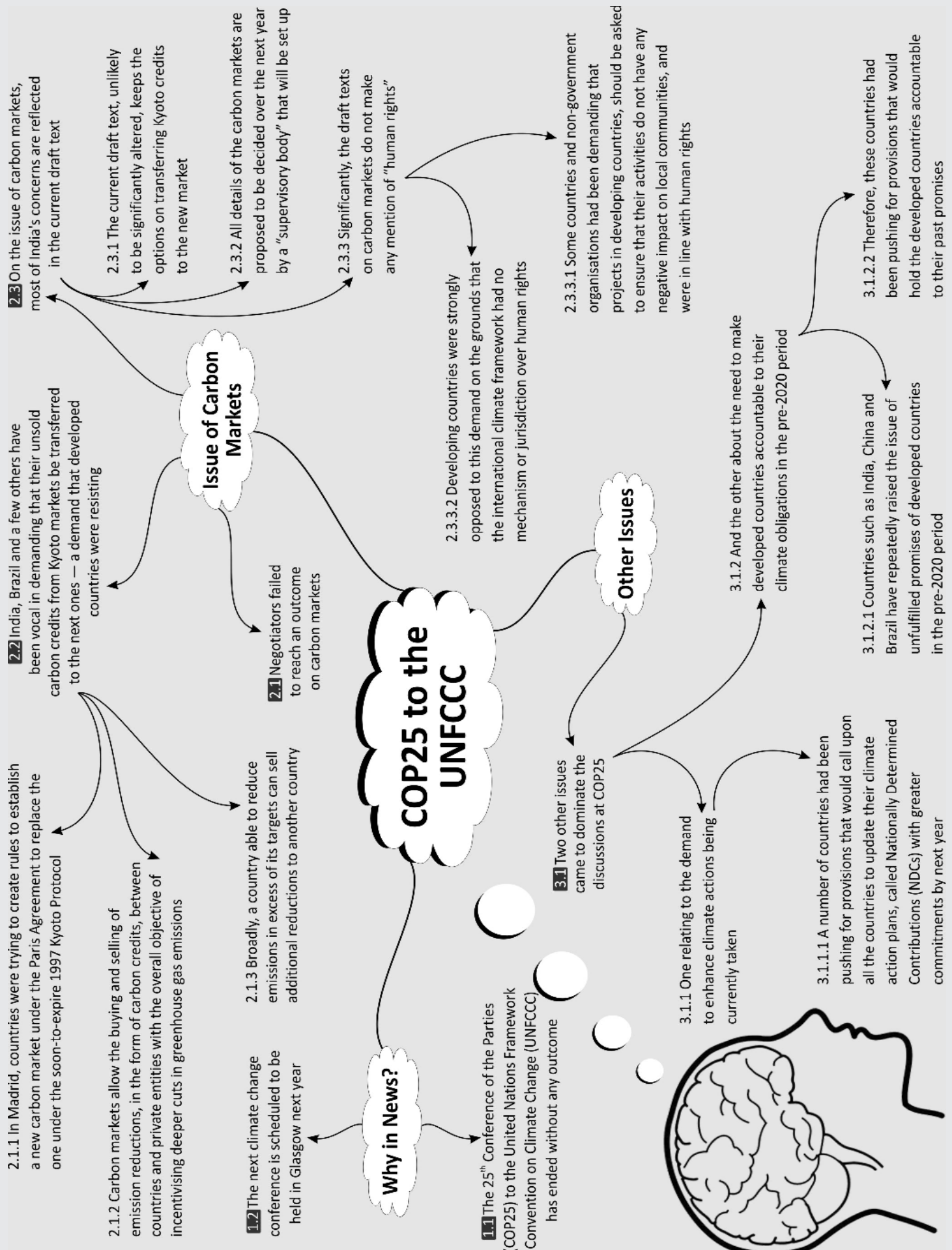
SEVEN BRAIN BOOSTERS

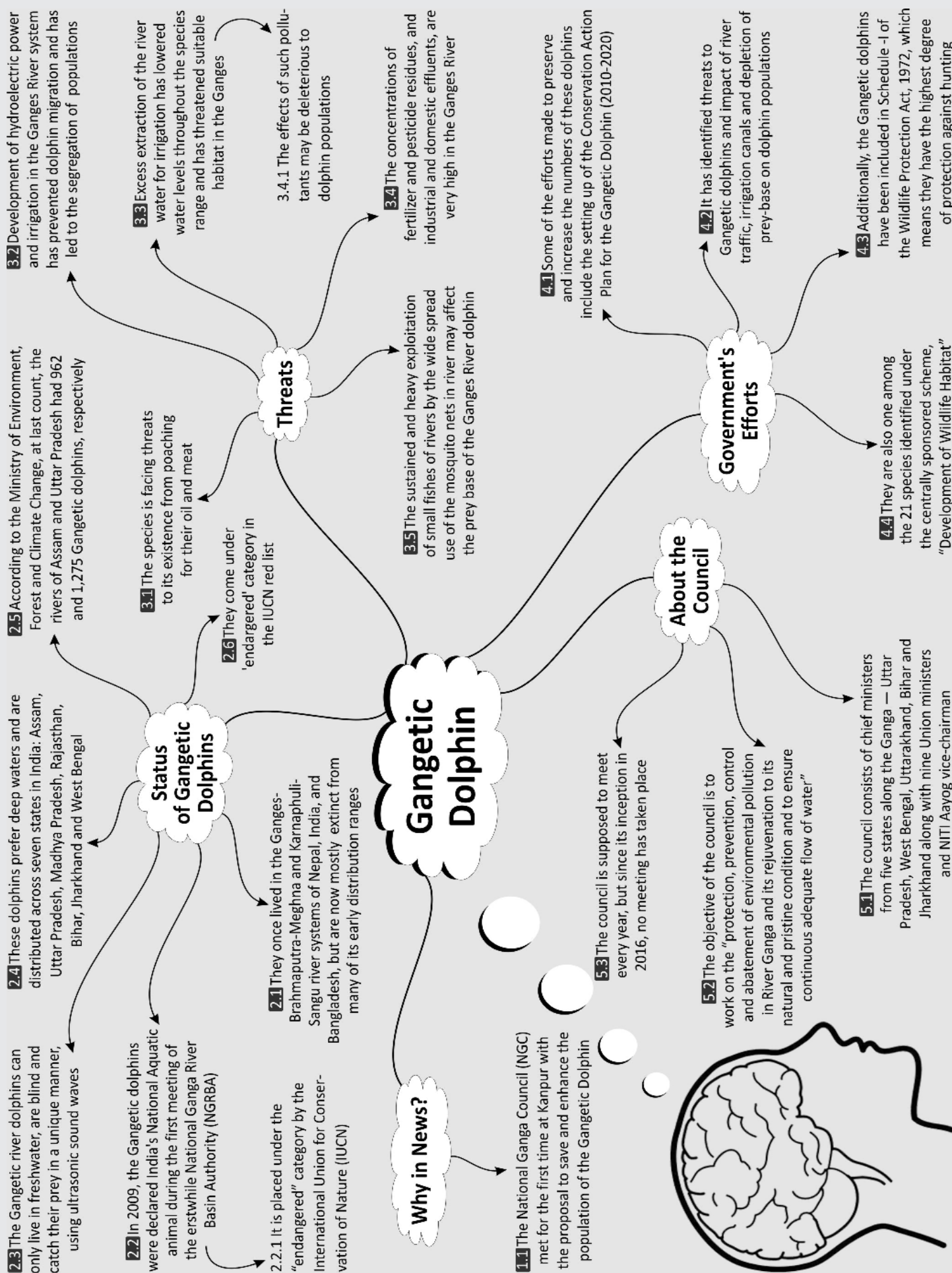


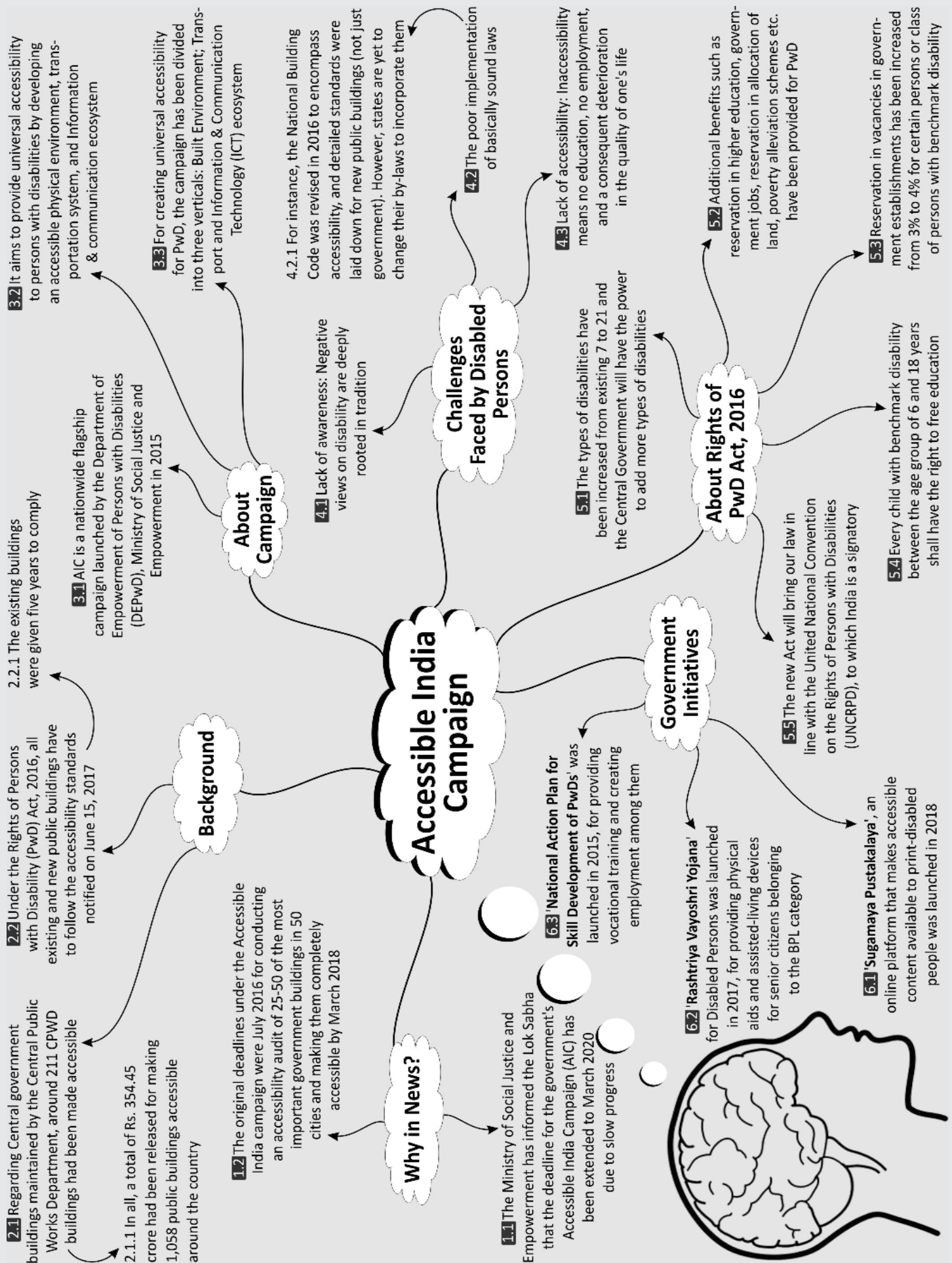












SEVEN MCQ's WITH EXPLANATORY ANSWERS

(Based on Brain Boosters)

1. The Recycling of Ships Act, 2019

Q. Consider the following statements with respect of the 'Recycling of Ships Act, 2019':

1. The Act will apply to only warship, or other ship owned by Central government and state governments.
2. It will restrict the use of hazardous material on ships and regulates the recycling of ships in India.

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

Answer: (b)

Explanation: Statement 1 is not correct. The Act will apply to any new or existing ship which is registered in India, ships entering a port or terminal in India, or the territorial waters of India, any warship, or other ship owned and operated by an administration and used on government non-commercial service and ship recycling facilities operating in India.

Statement 2 is correct. The new Act will restrict the use of hazardous material on ships and regulates the recycling of ships.

2. Anti Maritime Piracy Bill, 2019

Q. With reference to the 'Anti Maritime Piracy Bill, 2019', consider the following statements:

1. The Bill is aimed at promoting the safety and security of India's maritime trade, and the safety of its crew members.
2. The Bill will apply to all parts of the sea adjacent to and beyond the limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone of India.
3. Exclusive Economic Zone refers to the area of sea to which India has exclusive rights for economic activities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d)

Explanation: All statements are correct. The Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill 2019 is aimed at promoting the safety and security of India's maritime trade, and the safety of its crew members. The Bill will apply to all parts of the sea adjacent to and beyond the limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone of India. Exclusive Economic Zone refers to the area of sea to which India has exclusive rights for economic activities.

3. The Arms (Amendment) Act, 2019

Q. Consider the following statements with respect of the 'Arms (Amendment) Act, 2019':

1. It seeks to decrease the number of licensed firearms allowed per person and increase penalties for certain offences under the Act.
2. The Amendment Act reduces the number of permitted firearms from three to one.

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

Answer: (c)

Explanation: Both statements are correct. It seeks to decrease the number of licensed firearms allowed per person and increase penalties for certain offences under the Act. Under the previous Act, a license must be obtained to acquire, possess, or carry any firearm. A person can obtain a license for up to three firearms (with certain exceptions, such as for licensed firearms dealers). The Amendment Act reduces the number of permitted firearms from three to one. This includes licenses given on inheritance or heirloom basis.

It also increases the duration of the validity of a firearm license from three years to five years.

4. The International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019

Q. The Parliament has passed the International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) Authority Act, 2019. Consider the following statements with this regard:

1. It provides for the establishment of an Authority to develop and regulate the financial services market in the IFSCs.

2. IFSCs can be set up in an SEZ or as an SEZ after approval from the Centre as well as respective states.

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

Answer: (a)

Explanation: **Statement 1 is correct.** The Authority will regulate financial products (such as securities, deposits or contracts of insurance), financial services, and financial institutions which have been previously approved by any appropriate regulator (such as RBI or SEBI), in an IFSC.

Statement 2 is not correct. The SEZ Act, 2005 allows setting up an IFSC in an SEZ or as an SEZ after approval from the central government.

5. COP25 to the UNFCCC

Q. Consider the following statements with respect of COP 25 to the UNFCCC:

1. It has ended with the adoption of rule based mechanism related to the carbon markets.
2. It will replace the existing mechanism, which is under the Kyoto Protocol, 1997.

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

Answer: (d)

Explanation: **Both statements are incorrect.** The 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has ended without any outcome. Negotiators failed to reach an outcome on carbon markets.

In Madrid, countries were trying to create rules to establish a new carbon market under the Paris Agreement to replace the one under the soon-to-expire 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

6. Gangetic Dolphin

Q. Consider the following statements with respect of 'Ganga River Dolphins':

1. It is placed under the "critically endangered" category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
2. It has been included in Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which means they have the highest degree of protection against hunting.

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

Answer: (b)

Explanation: **Statement 1 is not correct.** In 2009, the Gangetic dolphins were declared India's National Aquatic animal during the first meeting of the erstwhile National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA). It is placed under the "endangered" category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Statement 2 is correct. Additionally, the Gangetic dolphins have been included in Schedule -I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which means they have the highest degree of protection against hunting. They are also one among the 21 species identified under the centrally sponsored scheme, "Development of Wildlife Habitat".

7. Accessible India Campaign

Q. Consider the following statements with respect of 'Accessible India Campaign (AIC)':

1. AIC was launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with the help of Niti Aayog in 2015.
2. The AIC has been divided into three verticals: Built Environment; Transport and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.
3. It has achieved the target of making government buildings accessible to disabled persons by 2018.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only b) 2 and 3 only
c) 2 only d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c)

Explanation: **Statement 1 is not correct.** AIC is a nationwide flagship campaign launched by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2015.

Statement 2 is correct. For creating universal accessibility for PwD, the campaign has been divided into three verticals: Built Environment; Transport and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.

Statement 3 is not correct. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has informed the Lok Sabha that the deadline for the government's Accessible India Campaign (AIC) has been extended to March 2020 due to slow progress. The original deadlines under the Accessible India campaign were July 2016 for conducting an accessibility audit of 25-50 of the most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them completely accessible and March 2018.



SEVEN IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. Who is known as Indian 'Greta' for her passion towards the fight against climate change?

–Eight-year-old Licypriya Kangujam, Manipur

2. Which international organisation has suggested India to create "Brand Northeast"?

–World Bank

3. Which city has been selected as the world's leading sports tourism at 26th edition of World Travel Awards (WTA)?

–Abu Dhabi

4. Which personality has been named Time magazine's Person of the Year for 2019?

–Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg

5. Who has been awarded with 'DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2019'?

–Amitabha Bagchi for his novel 'Half The Night Is Gone'

6. Who has won the 69th Miss World beauty pageant title?

–Toni-Ann Singh (Jamaica)

7. Who has won the 68th Miss Universe pageant title?

–Zozibini Tunzi (South Africa)

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SEVEN PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR MAINS EXAM

1. What do you understand by 'stagflation'? Is India facing stagflation? Comment.
2. India must negotiate growing Chinese presence in Indo-Pacific region. Discuss.
3. "Empowering women is the key to control population growth." Discuss.
4. An Asian engine driven by India and China. Discuss how region's rise is linked to peace and stability; cooperation rests on a compact between the two countries.
5. What are the basic principles of public life? Illustrate any three of these with suitable examples.
6. Cutting off access to the Net is a frequently recurring phenomenon in India over the past several years. Is it effective security measure in democracy like India? Discuss.
7. How far is Integrated Farming System (IFS) helpful in sustaining agricultural production.

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SEVEN IMPORTANT NEWS

1. CAG Report on Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

According to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report titled 'Performance Audit of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)', the scheme has met 90% of its target of giving clean cooking fuel to 80 million people by March 2020, but its sustained usage remains a challenge as beneficiaries are not changing LPG cylinders regularly.

Key Highlights

It observed that the average annual refill consumption of 19.3 million consumers who had completed more than one year by the end of March 2018 was only 3.66 refills. Similar analysis

for 3.18 crore PMUY beneficiaries as on 31 December 2018 revealed that refill consumption declined to 3.21 refills per annum.

The report also highlighted deficiencies such as the issuance of connections to unintended beneficiaries, and problems with the software of the state run oil marketing companies for identifying intended beneficiaries and inadequacies in the de-duplication process. It also recommended the scrutiny of the entire LPG database to identify and restrict anomalies.

The report also flagged the risk of illegal diversion of subsidised cylinder.

The CAG also recommended; entering Aadhaar numbers of all adult family members of existing as well as new beneficiaries to make de-duplication effective and appropriate measures in distributors' software to restrict issuance to ineligible beneficiaries.

Background

The PMUY was launched on 1 May 2016, aims to safeguard the health of women and children and lays the basis for a fundamental material transformation at the bottom of the pyramid by covering 715 districts has till date provided 80.33 million connections. ■

2. Global Gender Gap Index Report 2019

World Economic Forum (WEF) has released the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2019. The report benchmarks countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment.

Key Highlights

- ◆ Iceland has been the frontrunner on the Global Gender Gap Index for 11 years in a row. It's followed by Nordic neighbours Norway, Finland and Sweden.
- ◆ While Yemen was ranked the worst at 153th place. Iraq and Pakistan remained in bottom three of the ladder.
- ◆ The United States is 53rd in the ranking, a drop of two places.

- ◆ Apart from that, China ranked 106th, Bangladesh at 50th, Brazil at 92nd, Nepal at 101st, Indonesia at 85th and Sri Lanka at 102nd.

- ◆ The report highlights that as per the present scenario, workplace inequality will not be erased until the year 2276.

- ◆ The report also said that it will take 95 years to close the political gender gap as women hold 25.2% of parliamentary seats worldwide.

India's Performance

India has slipped four places on the index to 112, behind neighbours China, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, due to rising disparity in terms of women's health and participation in the economy. Moreover, India is now ranked in the bottom-five in terms of women's health and survival and

economic participation. The report also highlighted abnormally low sex ratios at birth in India (91 girls for every 100 boys) and Pakistan (92/100).

On a positive note, India has closed two-thirds of its overall gender gap, but the condition of women in large section of India's society is precarious and the economic gender gap has significantly widened since 2006. India is the only country among the 153 countries studied where the economic gender gap is larger than the political one.

India ranks high on the political empowerment sub-index, largely because the country was headed by a woman for 20 of the past 50 years. But, female political representation today is low as women make up only 14.4 per cent of Parliament (122nd rank globally) and 23 per cent of the cabinet (69th). ■

3. Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2019

The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Act, 2019 (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2019).

Key Highlights

The Act envisages the completion of investigation in seven days and trial in 14 working days, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months. The Andhra Pradesh (AP) Disha Act also prescribes life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children.

In cases of harassment of women through social or digital media, the Act states two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions.

The government of India has launched a National Registry of Sexual offenders but the database is not digitized and is not accessible to the public. In the AP Disha Act, 2019, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called the 'Women & Children Offenders Registry'. This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.

At present, provision for punishing an offender in a rape case is a fixed jail term leading to life imprisonment or the death sentence. The Disha Act, 2019 has prescribed the death penalty for rape crimes where there is adequate conclusive evidence.

In cases of molestation/sexual assault on children under the POCSO Act, 2012, punishment ranges from a minimum of three years to maximum of seven years of imprisonment. In the AP Disha Act 2019, apart from rape, the Government of Andhra Pradesh prescribes life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children. ■

4. 2019 could be Earth's Second Hottest Year

Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has announced that last month (November) was 1.66 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average, making it the second hottest November since record-keeping began 140 years ago. 2019 through November has been the second-hottest year on record, and the season (September through November) has been the second-hottest in recorded history. Both the season and the year to date were 1.69 degrees Fahrenheit above average, coming in just behind

2016 and 2015, respectively, and the average sea surface temperature was the second-warmest for the year to date.

The year 2019, however, witnessed national records in many countries in Europe. In France, a national record of 46.0°C (1.9°C above the previous record) was set on 28 June. National records were also set in Germany (42.6°C), the Netherlands (40.7°C), Belgium (41.8°C), Luxembourg (40.8°C) and the United Kingdom (38.7°C), with the heat also extending into the Nordic countries, where Helsinki had its

highest temperature on record (33.2°C on 28 July).

Impact

High temperatures can also cause a domino effect on the environment. For instance, sea ice coverage reached near-record lows in the Arctic and Antarctic this November. Without sea ice covering its surface, the ocean absorbs solar radiation and becomes warmer, and some research suggests that receding sea ice can also lead to higher snowfall. ■

5. StrandHogg Bug

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has sent an alert to all states warning them about the vulnerability of the Android operating system to a bug called 'StrandHogg' that allows real-time malware applications to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kind.

Key Highlights

While all versions of Android, including Android 10, are vulnerable to this bug, it may not be apparent to the affected users that malware applications are already on board their device. These malware can then potentially listen

to their conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, make calls, record conversations and get login credentials to various accounts.

This apart, things that such malware can access include private images, files, contact details, call logs, and location information.

Modus Operandi

Pop-ups asking for permission to send notifications, messages etc., are one of the main entry points for 'StrandHogg' to launch the attack. An app in which the user is already logged in asking him/her to login again is another

anomaly pointing to the possibilities of a cyberattack. Once users approve such requests, the malware would instantly access the mobile phone or tablet for specific purposes. It can activate the microphone, allowing a hacker in a remote location to listen

to live conversations. The camera can also be switched on to capture visuals.

Links and buttons that become non-functional, apps asking for permissions that are not required are among the other warning signs.

6. World's Oldest Cave found in Indonesia

According to the researchers, a cave painting found on Indonesia's island of Sulawesi, depicting human-like figures hunting animals, appears to be the earliest known pictorial record of storytelling. The painting, found in a limestone cave in 2017, was dated to



nearly 44,000 years ago using uranium-series analysis.

Key Highlights

It shows eight therianthropes, or humans with animal characteristics, appearing to chase and kill six animals such as the warty pigs native to the island, using what seem to be spears and ropes. The portrayal of multiple hunters confronting at least two separate prey species possibly suggests a game drive, a communal hunt in which animals are indiscriminately

flushed from cover and directed towards waiting hunters.

The Indonesian cave painting also provided some of the earliest evidence of human spirituality.

Until now, the oldest rock art showing a character with the characteristics of an animal had been an ivory sculpture found in a cave in Germany. Thought to date back 40,000 years, it depicts a human body attached to a feline-like head.

7. European Green Deal

Amidst the chaos of COP25 in Madrid, the European Commission has published its 'European Green Deal'.

The Deal aims to be a comprehensive strategy document which puts the European Union (EU) on a trajectory toward "no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use."

The 'European Green Deal' is highly conscious of this fact, announcing a number of climate-focused action points over the next 12 months, some of which are:

- ◆ Proposal on a European 'Climate Law' enshrining the 2050 climate neutrality objective (March 2020).
- ◆ Comprehensive plan to increase

the EU 2030 climate target to at least 50 per cent and towards 55 per cent in a responsible way (Summer 2020).

- ◆ Assessment of the final National Energy and Climate Plans (June 2020).
- ◆ Strategy on offshore wind.
- ◆ Initiatives to stimulate lead markets for climate neutral and circular products in energy intensive industrial sectors (from 2020).
- ◆ Proposal to support zero carbon steel-making processes by 2030.
- ◆ Legislation on batteries in support of the Strategic Action Plan on Batteries and the circular economy (October 2020).

- ◆ Launch of the European Climate Pact (March 2020).

The policy focus on a number of sectors critical to climate action is positive (and a long-standing feature in EU policy), but the genuinely new information in this announcement is concentrated in the first two points — a climate law, and an emissions reduction target.

The EU's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the Paris Agreement binds it to reduce its emissions by 40 per cent between 1990 and 2030. In that sense, the Green Deal announcement is an improvement — to reduce emissions by at least 50 per cent between 1990 and 2030.

SEVEN IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS FROM PIB

1. India Design Council

The India Design Council (IDC) has launched the Chartered Designs of India (CDI) and the Design Education Quality Mark (DEQM) to promote design education and standards.

Key Highlights

These two initiatives of IDC and National Institute of design, Ahmedabad will help to address the 5 challenges of scale, quality of design, quality of education for design, raising the priority for design in industry and design for public purpose.

The DEQM will benchmark design education programmes on predetermined standards and will accord Design Education Quality Mark to institutions that meet the provisions of the published standard. The DEQ

Mark will be granted to institutions which undergo the review process and meet or exceed the expectations for quality and standards as prescribed in the Quality Code.

The Quality Mark will help students to choose the right design programme from a wide choice, help prospective employers understand the standing of the design institute and communicate to the society about the adherence of Quality Code by the design institute.

The second initiative CDI is envisaged as an institution that will establish and uphold the professional standards of design practice in India. The focus of CDI is the "Professional Designer" identified by a design qualification and or experience. CDI is a cohesive platform that adheres

to the design practice to standards in professional design competence, ethics and service.

Need

As design education gains momentum in India, it is necessary that commissioners of design projects and designers are able to distinguish qualified professional designers as against hobbyists and non-professionals. India has a growing design ecosystem that has resulted in growth both in employment of creative skills and impact in the service sector. Creative manufacturing and design innovation will be the key drivers in the 'Make in India' initiative of 2020 and beyond and further strengthening the brand 'designed in India'.

2. Agreement on Social Security between India and Brazil

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the agreement on social security between the Republic of India and the Federative Republic of Brazil. India has been entering into bilateral Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with other countries in order to protect the interests of Indian professionals / skilled workers working abroad for short durations and enhance the competitiveness of Indian companies.

SSAs broadly provide the following three benefits:

- ♦ Avoiding making of double social security contributions by the

workers (detachment);

- ♦ Easy remittance of benefits (Exportability);
- ♦ Aggregating the contribution periods (in two countries) to prevent loss of benefits (Totalization). The agreement will also provide for disability insurance benefits to the Indian nationals working abroad. As on date, India has signed SSAs with 18 countries.

Background

The idea to ink pacts on social security programmes with BRICS nations was discussed at the meetings of the

BRICS Labour & Employment Ministers held on 9 June 2016 in Geneva and on 27-28 September 2016 in New Delhi, respectively. The possibility of concluding social security agreements between BRICS countries also finds mention in the Goa Declaration of the 8th BRICS Leaders' Summit.

Significance

At present, about 1,000 Brazilians are living in India, while about 4,700 Indians are living in Brazil. All posted/detached workers and self-employed persons will benefit from this proposal without any discrimination. Thus, it would promote equity and inclusiveness.

3. Fiftieth Flight of PSLV

India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), in its fiftieth flight (PSLV-C48) has successfully launched RISAT-2BR1 along with nine commercial satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota. 9 Commercial satellites of Israel, Italy, Japan and USA were launched under commercial arrangement with New Space India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Till date, ISRO has put into orbit 319 foreign satellites.

About RISAT-2BR1

RISAT-2BR1 is a radar imaging Earth observation satellite weighing about 628 kg. The satellite will provide

services in the field of agriculture, forestry and disaster management. The mission life of RISAT-2BR1 is 5 years.

RISAT-2BR1 is the second satellite in the RISAT-2B series and along with the CARTOSAT-3 is part of 'spy' satellites that will boost defence forces' ability to carry out Earth surveillance from the space.

RISAT-2BR1 will be followed by another satellite of the RISAT-2B series later this month. A fourth RISAT-2B type satellite will be launched later to complete a quartet of 'spy' satellites with advance Earth imaging abilities.

These satellites will help keep a check on infiltration by allowing round-the-clock surveillance across the

border. These satellites are equipped with a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) that can take pictures of Earth both during the day and night, irrespective of the cloud conditions.

About PSLV

Between 1994 and 2019, the PSLV launched 50 Indian satellites and 222 foreign satellites for over 70 international customers from 20 countries. It also successfully launched two spacecraft — Chandrayaan-1 and Mars Orbiter Mission.

In the last 26 years, the PSLV has had five variants with the carrying capability increased to 1.9 tonnes from 850 kg.

4. Climate Smart Farming Systems' for BIMSTEC

The 'International Seminar on Climate Smart Farming Systems' for Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries was organized by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare and Indian Council of Agricultural Research in New Delhi.

The objective of this international seminar was to have experience sharing to enable improvement of tropical smallholder farming systems for greater productivity and resilience to climate change through ecological approaches. Some of the success

stories were shared as case studies for the benefit of the BIMSTEC countries.

What is Climate Smart Agriculture?

Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) is an approach that helps to guide actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate. CSA aims to tackle three main objectives: sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes; adapting and building resilience to climate change; and reducing and/or removing

greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.

About BIMSTEC

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising of seven member states, namely Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, in South Asia and Southeast Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. This sub-regional organisation came into being on June 6, 1997, through the 'Bangkok Declaration'.

5. 29th National Energy Conservation Day

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has organised the 29th National Energy Conservation Day (14th December). The event was organised with an aim to promote energy conservation among all the sectors of economy.

Energy Efficiency

Government of India has undertaken a two pronged approach to cater to the energy demand of its citizens while ensuring minimum growth in CO₂

emissions, so that the global emissions do not lead to an irreversible damage to the Earth system. On one hand, in the generation side, the government is promoting greater use of renewable in the energy mix mainly through solar

and wind and at the same time shifting towards supercritical technologies for coal based power plants. On the other side, efforts are being made to efficiently use the energy in the demand side through various innovative policy measures under the overall ambit of Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

Government's Initiatives

Standards and Labeling by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE); Energy



Conservation Building Codes (ECBC) by the Ministry of Power; National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE) under NAPCC; Promotion of Energy Efficient LED Bulbs – UJALA scheme and Promotion of Electric vehicle. Under National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) are some key initiatives.

About BEE

BEE is a statutory body under Ministry of Power which is mandated to implement policy and programmes in energy efficiency and conservation. The objective of such initiatives is to reduce energy intensity in our country by optimizing energy demand and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) which are responsible for global warming and climate change.

6. Green Window for Green Energy Finance

The Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) is planning to set up a dedicated “Green Window to serve the unserved segments of renewable energy.”

What are Green Windows?

Green windows, like green banks, are public entities created to work with the private sector to increase investment in green energy and bring clean energy financing into the mainstream. They are innovative and new tools that have been successful in the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Malaysia and the United States.

The Green Window would be set up to dedicatedly support underserved clean energy markets and support the scaling up of new clean energy technologies. The seed capital will be used to leverage additional sources of capital from both private domestic banks and international sources.

Need

India, however, needs high amount of capital invested – of the order of Rs. 21,45,000 crore (USD 330 billion) between 2018 and 2030 - to accomplish its commitments under the Paris Agreement. Given the existing high exposure to conventional power,

there is limited debt capacity in the financial system to fund the amount of new generation needed to meet renewables targets. A green window would lower the risk for traditional banks to finance green energy and tap into international capital to help India power its cities and rural communities.

Energy Profile of India

India is one of the top three nations leading global renewable energy growth. As of October 2019, India's installed capacity renewable capacity has already met about half of its 2022 target of 175 GW.

7. National Broadband Mission

The government of India has launched 'National Broadband Mission', which envisages an investment of Rs. 7 lakh crore by 2022 from both government and industry to connect the country digitally at a faster pace.

Key Highlights

The vision of the national broadband mission is to fast-track growth of digital communications infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, facilitate digital empowerment and inclusion, and provide affordable and universal access of broadband for all.

The mission is part of the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018.

The mission will facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services across the country, especially in rural and remote areas.

Under the mission, the government plans to lay incremental 30 lakh route km of Optical Fiber Cable, while also increasing tower density from 0.42 to 1 tower per thousand of population by 2024.

Under the mission, the Centre will work with States and UTs for having consistent policies pertaining to expansion of digital infrastructure

including for Right of Way (RoW) approvals required for laying of optical fibre cable. Additionally, a Broadband Readiness Index will be developed to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure within a State/UT.

The mission envisages stakeholder investment of \$100 billion (Rs. 7 lakh crore), including Rs. 70,000 crore from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) in coming years and “address policy and regulatory changes required to accelerate the expansion and creation of digital infrastructure and services”.



SEVEN IMPORTANT CONCEPTS THROUGH GRAPHICS

Cold Deserts of the World

1. Gobi

- The Gobi Desert is the largest desert in Asia and fifth largest in the world. The desert stretches in two countries territory. It extends out to Mongolia's South and on the other side it reaches out to northern and northwestern parts of China.
- The word "Gobi" means "large and dry" in the Mongolian language.
- Some geologists considered that Mongolian Gobi was once a bottom of sea in ancient time and found fossilized coral heads, 'sea lilies' and various shells in the Gobi Altai province.
- With the elevations of its basins ranging from roughly 1600 to 5000 feet above sea level, the Gobi lies at about the same latitudes as those of central Europe and the northern United States.
- Its arid climate is attributable to its location, in the rain shadow of the Himalayan and connecting ranges, which intercept moisture-laden clouds before they can reach most of the Gobi.
- Further, the Gobi Desert is still growing as a result of climate change and desertification.
- Mongolian Gobi Desert has one of the biggest and beautiful sand dunes called 'Khongoryn sand dune'. Around 5% of the total area are sand dunes.
- The Gobi Desert is categorized by the World Wildlife Federation as consisting of two broadly defined ecoregions: the 'Gobi Steppe Desert' and the 'Gobi Lakes Valley Desert Steppe' region.
- The Gobi Desert is noted for its extreme temperature variation, with days commonly dipping from sweltering midday heat to freezing temperatures at night. During the winter, the Gobi Desert experiences extremely low temperatures that are not found in other surrounding areas of China and Mongolia.
- The Gobi desert is the home to a surprising number of animals. This includes gazelles, polecats, camels, Mongolian wild donkeys, and a whole load of lizards.



2. Greenland

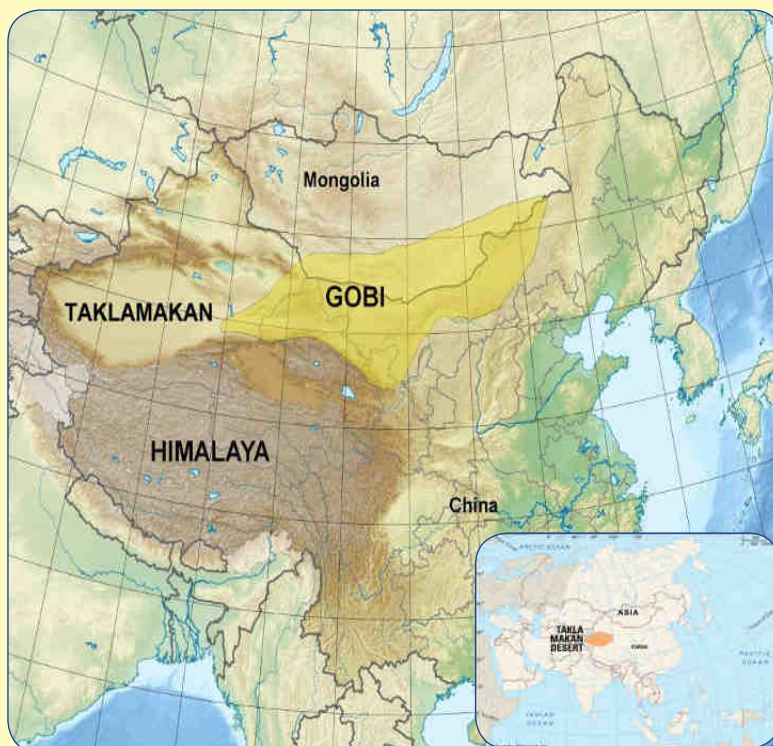


- Greenland is located between the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Canada and northwest of Iceland.
- Greenland is the biggest island on Earth and the least densely populated.
- One of Greenland's most prominent geographic features is its massive ice sheet, which covers more than 80 percent of the island.
- The remaining ice-free land consists of the island's coastal regions and is made primarily of highlands. Mountain chains run along the country's East and West coasts, with the highest point reaching 3,700 m at Gunnbjorn Mountain in the southeast.
- Northern Greenland — the area North of the Arctic Circle — experiences perpetual daylight, or the midnight sun, for two months in the summer, and polar night, or perpetual darkness, in the winter.
 - The Arctic Circle is an imaginary line that encircles the globe at 66 degrees, 34 minutes north. It marks the latitude above which the sun does not set on the summer solstice and does not rise on the winter solstice.

- Because of its very high latitude, Greenland has an arctic to a subarctic climate with cool summers and very cold winters. Along the north-central coast, the climate is arctic, meaning that the summer temperatures hover around freezing 0°C. The climate is a little milder (subarctic) toward the South.
- Greenland is home to many species of mammals and birds, including polar bears, reindeer (also called caribou), musk oxen, arctic foxes, eagles, ptarmigan, hares, lemmings and the Arctic wolf.

3. Taklamakan

- The Taklamakan occupies the central part of the Tarim Basin in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, western China.
- It is thought that the name 'Taklamakan' was derived from the Uighur language, in which it means 'you can get in, but you can't get out'. However, another plausible explanation is that it comes from Turki taqlar makan, meaning "the place of ruins".
- The Taklamakan is flanked by high mountain ranges: the Tien Shan to the North, the Kunlun Mountains to the South, and the Pamirs to the West. There is a gradual transition to the Lop Nur basin in the East; in the South and West, between the sandy desert and the mountains, lies a band of sloping desert lowland composed of pebble-detritus deposits.
- Despite being the warmest and driest desert in China, the Taklamakan experiences extremely cold winter temperatures. The average temperature during winter is -10°C to -9°C and the lowest temperature recorded being -32°C in February 2008.
- Vegetation is extremely sparse in the Takla Makan; almost the entire region is devoid of plant cover. In depressions among the sand dunes, where the groundwater lies no deeper than 10 to 15 feet (3 to 5 metres) from the surface, thin thickets of tamarisk, nitre bushes, and reeds may be found.
- The animal life of the Takla Makan is also extremely sparse. Herds of gazelles can be found in some open areas near water and vegetation. Wild boars, wolves and foxes can also be found. The dunes contain large numbers of rabbits, mice and gerbils. Hedgehogs and bats are common. The common birds of the Takla Makan are tufted larks and the Tarim jay.



4. Arctic

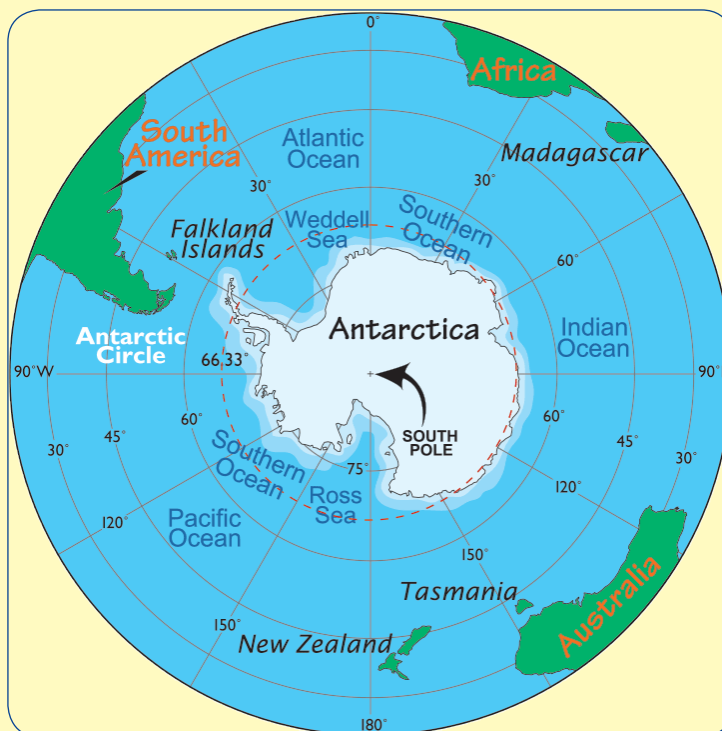


- The Arctic desert ecoregion is a terrestrial ecoregion that covers the island groups of Svalbard (Norway), Franz Josef Land (Russia), Severny Island (Russia) and Severnaya Zemlya (Russia) in the Arctic Ocean, above 75 degrees North latitude. It stretches, across the Arctic Ocean North of Norway and Russia.
- As the cold Arctic air is unable to hold much moisture, it therefore doesn't rain or snow very often here, making for desert conditions. As a result, the air is dry in the Arctic just as it would be in a conventional "hot" desert, even though there is an ocean at the Arctic.
- The average temperature in the Arctic Desert is -20°C , reaching as low as -50°C in the winter. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Arctic Desert is its sunshine patterns. During the summer months, the sun doesn't set for a period of 60 days. These are then followed in the winter by a period of prolonged darkness.
- There are various species of plants and animals that have adapted to survive at the Arctic desert. The Arctic tundra has about 1,700 plant species, including flowering plants, dwarf shrubs, herbs, grasses, mosses, and lichens.

- There also are wild animals, like the Polar bear, Arctic fox, Greenland whale, narwhal, Beluga whales, walrus, Ringed lemming, Greenland seals, Bearded seals, and reindeer, to be found in various places therein.

5. Antarctica

- Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, and most isolated continent on Earth, and is considered a desert because its annual precipitation can be less than 51 mm in the interior. It's covered by a permanent ice sheet that contains 90% of the Earth's fresh water.
- Only 2% of the continent isn't covered by ice, and this land is strictly along the coasts, where all the life that is associated with the land mass reside. The other 98% of Antarctica is covered by ice which averages 1.6 km in thickness.
- Despite having very little precipitation, Antarctica still experiences massive windstorms. Much like sandstorms in the desert, the high winds pick up snow and turn into blizzards. These storms can reach speeds of up to 320 km an hour (200 mph) and are one of the reasons the continent is so cold.
- The lowest temperature ever recorded on Earth was at Russia's Vostok Station in Antarctica: -89.2°C on 21st July, 1983.
- There are no permanent human residents, but anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000 researchers inhabit the research stations scattered across the continent – the largest being McMurdo Station, located on the tip of Ross Island. Beyond a limited range of mammals, only certain cold-adapted species of mites, algae, and tundra vegetation can survive there.
- 'Bharti' is a permanent Antarctic research station commissioned by India. It is India's third Antarctic research facility and one of two active Indian Research stations alongside 'Maitri'. India's first, committed research facility, 'Dakshin Gangotri', is being used as a supply box.
- Large populations of penguins, whales, fish and invertebrates thrive along Antarctica's coasts and frigid seas, especially in the summer.



6. Atacama



- The Atacama Desert is a plateau in South America, covering a 1,000-kilometre strip of land on the Pacific coast, West of the Andes mountains.
- The Atacama desert is one of the driest places in the world (the driest being some very specific spots within the McMurdo Dry Valleys), as well as the only true desert to receive less precipitation than the polar deserts.
- Most of the desert is composed of stony terrain, salt lakes (salares), sand, and felsic lava that flows towards the Andes.
- The desert owes its extreme aridity to a constant temperature inversion due to the cool north-flowing Humboldt ocean current, and to the presence of the strong Pacific anticyclone. The most arid region of the Atacama desert is situated between two mountain chains (the Andes and the Chilean Coast Range) of sufficient height to prevent moisture advection from either the Pacific or the Atlantic Oceans, a two-sided rain shadow.
- On average, the driest part of the Atacama receives less than a millimeter of rain each year.
- During the day, temperatures in the desert can reach around 40°C, and in the night these temperatures can fall to 5°C.
- The extreme ecosystem of the Atacama makes survival difficult for animals. However, red scorpions, grey foxes, desert wasps and butterflies are among the species able to cope with the dry environment.

7. Great Basin

- The Great Basin Desert is part of the Great Basin between the Sierra Nevada and the Wasatch Range in the USA.
- The desert is a geographical region that largely overlaps the Great Basin shrub steppe defined by the World Wildlife Fund, and the Central Basin and Range ecoregion defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and United States Geological Survey.
- The Great Basin Desert exists because of the "rainshadow effect" created by the Sierra Nevada Mountains of eastern California. When prevailing winds from the Pacific Ocean rise to go over the Sierra, the air cools and loses most of its moisture as rain. By the time the winds cross over the mountains and sweep down the far side, they are very dry and absorb moisture from the surrounding area. This drying effect is responsible for creating the Great Basin Desert.
- The Great Basin Desert is the only "cold" desert in the country, where most precipitation falls in the form of snow. A desert is defined as a region that receives less than 10 inches (25cm) of precipitation per year.
- Great Basin vegetation is low and homogeneous, often with a single dominant species of bush for miles. Typical shrubs are Big Sagebrush, Blackbrush, Shadscale, Mormon-tea and greasewood. There are only occasional yuccas and very few cactus.



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