

30 Apr 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Respond to plea on EVMs and VVPATs, SC tells EC

Context:

- The Election Commission said that penal provision for a voter making any false allegation about VVPAT displaying wrong result was necessary to prevent frivolous complaints.
- The EC's assertion came on a day when the Supreme Court sought its response to a petition seeking decriminalisation of the related provision, Rule 49MA of the Conduct of Elections Rules.

Issue:

- The Election Commission had received three complaints about VVPAT displaying wrong result, one each from Gujarat and Kerala and another from a former DGP in Assam.
- While the first two complaints were found to be incorrect, the former DGP refused to give a declaration that he would be penalised if his complaint turned out to be false.
- Deputy Election Commissioner said it usually took more than 20 minutes for poll officials to address a complaint of VVPAT showing wrong result. A series of such complaints could even sabotage the election process.

What is the procedure followed if a complaint is raised about the EVM/ VVPATs?

Rule 49MA of the Conduct of Elections Rules was inserted to prescribe the procedure to be followed in case of complaint made by the elector about alleged wrong particulars of a candidate, symbol on paper slip generated by the printer on casting votes using the EVM.

- Any person making a claim about the malfunction after casting his vote has to make a declaration, after which the person is allowed to cast a “test” vote.
- If the allegation is found true, the presiding officer shall report the facts immediately to the returning officer, stop further recording of votes in that voting machine and act as per the direction that may be given by the Returning Officer.
- If the allegation is false, a case under Section 177 of the IPC is made out.
- It prescribes simple imprisonment for a term extending to six months, or with fine of Rs.1,000, or both.

Concerns about Rule 49MA of the Conduct of Elections Rules:

- A petition has been filed to reconsider the provision.
- Petitioner submitted, “It may not be fair and just to charge an elector for reporting such a deviant behaviour... Yet, presently, in all eventualities, the onus/burden of proof is on the elector, who will face the criminal charges irrespective of whether that reporting is truthful and honest.”
- The declaration signed by the complainant makes it clear that he/she is liable for punishment under section 177 of IPC if the declaration given is found to be incorrect.
- This could have the impact of terrifying a voter into not complaining and thus impacting negatively on a free and fair election process.
- The rule infringed upon a citizen's right to freedom of expression, which is a fundamental right of free expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, the petition said.
- The petition explained the various forms of “deviant behaviour” the EVMs and VVPATs could possibly have, including an “unsolicited programme” by ballots cast for one candidate may be transferred, not sequentially, but rather intermittently (at pre-programmed intervals or otherwise) to another candidate.
- Therefore, where an elector is asked to cast test vote as prescribed under Rule 49MA, he may not be able to reproduce the same result which he was complaining about, one more time in a sequence, because of the intermittent pre-programmed deviant behaviour of the electronic machines
- Other such “malfunctions” may include printing of paper slips of candidates in such a way that these are likely to face rejection under the Conduct of Election Rules of 1961.
- A third possibility, the petition said, would be that VVPATs can be stuffed [just like it used to be done in the traditional ballot boxes], by overriding the 12-second barrier of EVMs.

Way forward:

The need of the hour is the adoption of a method that objectively determines the truthfulness of VVPAT

complaints.

2. Army invokes emergency powers for missile deal

Context:

The Army is in the process of procuring Spike-LR Anti-Tank Missiles from Israel and Igla-S Very Short Range Air Defence Systems (VSHORAD) from Russia through a set of new financial powers for emergency procurements sanctioned by the Defence Ministry earlier this month.

Emergency financial powers to the army:

- Following the Pulwama attack, the armed forces have been given emergency powers by the Government for buying equipment to enable them to fight wars on the western border with Pakistan.
- Under the latest emergency financial powers, armed forces have been given a free hand to procure equipment worth up to Rs.300 crore on a priority basis.
- The Request For Proposal (RFP) for the two deals have been issued and negotiations are ongoing.
- Under the emergency route, the Army is looking to procure about 12 launchers and around 250 missiles for each system. Deliveries have to be completed in three months, but extendable to six months.
- Entirely new systems not in use can also be procured under the new powers.
- For the procurement under the emergency orders, the forces need not even take concurrence of the Integrated Financial Advisor from the defence finance department.
- The defence Ministry feels that since the forces have to fight wars, they should decide on their requirement and priority in the acquisition and buy that equipment.
- Officials said the emergency procurements were one of critical procurement and not related to the acquisitions through the regular route, in a bid to assure that these would not impact the regular deals.

Details:

Spike-LR Anti-Tank Missiles:

- Spike-LR Anti-Tank Missiles are being procured from Israel.
- It has a range of 4 km.
- It is being procured is a different variant from the one tested and shortlisted as part of the earlier procurement for over 8,000 missiles and 300 launchers along with technology transfer.
- As contract negotiations dragged on, the deal was cancelled and it was decided to procure a smaller number — 170 launchers, 4,500 missiles and 15 simulators — through an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) and make up the balance requirement with an indigenous Man Portable ATGM currently under development.

VSHORAD deal:

- Very Short Range Air Defence (VSHORAD) to replace the legacy Igla systems in service, began in 2010 and has since seen several trials and re-trials with three contenders in the fray — MBDA of France, Rosoboronexport of Russia and SAAB of Sweden.
- Eventually, all three were declared technically complaint last year.
- The deal is currently at the Contract Negotiation phase.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India-China team on pharma to meet next month

Context:

India will be sending a high-level delegation to the first meeting of the working group on pharmaceuticals, with China, scheduled in Beijing next month.

Details:

- An initiative under the India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) Mechanism, the working group meeting comes in the backdrop of growing efforts by India to increase pharma exports to China.
- In doing so, the emphasis has been on impressing upon China to make the drug registration process easier for Indian pharma companies.
- There is a need for strengthening our exports to China and also to reduce import dependence from China, which could be achieved with regular trade and bilateral discussions.
- In 2018-19, China figured in the 17th spot in the list of India's top pharma export destinations.
- The growth potential, however, is much higher, considering the fact that the exports grew 52% in 2017-18.
- Pharmaceuticals, according to Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil), has come to the centrestage of such discussions in the wake of China removing import tariffs on oncology drugs and a few others products.
- It is against this backdrop India is keen on China relaxing the drug registration process.
- Such a move would encourage more Indian companies to supply to China
- Now 3-5 years is the time taken for getting a product registration from China's National Medical Products Administration and the cost is about \$58,000 per drug.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. NGT direct U.P. govt. to take remedial action

Context:

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttar Pradesh government to take steps in curbing water pollution around industrial areas in the State.

Background:

A report was furnished by the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board stating that industrial effluents are contaminating the Hindon river.

Hindon River:

- Hindon River is a tributary of Yamuna river.
- It originates in the Saharanpur District, from Upper Shivalik in Lower Himalayan Range.
- The river is entirely rainfed.
- Kali river, which originates in the Doon Valley and travels to merge with Hindon River, before it merges with the Yamuna River.
- The Kali river is also highly polluted and adds to the pollution of the Hindon, as it passes through populated and industrial belt of Uttar Pradesh.

- The river was once considered to be so clean that its water was believed to cure the Kaali Khansi (bad cough).
- Now, the river is so polluted that it is nearly opaque. As per the government and other authorities, all the villagers living along the banks of the river have been warned not to drink its water as it has become a major health hazard.

Details:

- A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson said, “When industrial areas are set up, requisite infrastructure for scientific discharge of effluents is not being developed.”
- This aspect needs to be considered by the Chief Secretary, U.P., and remedial measures must be taken.
- Remedial measures to be taken are in respect of areas that are “already set up as well as the areas which may be set up later” as industrial areas.
- The action taken report submitted by the State Pollution Control Board acknowledges that industrial effluents and sewage are being discharged into the drain connecting Hindon river which is broken at many places. Overflow of the effluents is collected in vacant plots.

Concerns:

- Chemical pollution of surface water can create health risks, because such waterways are often used directly as drinking water sources or connected with shallow wells used for drinking water.
- In addition, waterways have important roles for washing and cleaning, for fishing and fish farming, and for recreation.
- Direct contamination occurs from badly designed hazardous waste sites or from industrial sites.

Way forward:

- Requisite infrastructure for scientific discharge of effluents must be made mandatory.
- Consumption or usage of a polluting product must be reduced.
- Wastes, discharges and disposals of a pollutant must be treated before letting out.
- Interventions pertaining to environmental hazards are often more sustainable if they address the driving forces behind the pollution at the community level rather than attempt to deal with specific exposures at the individual level.

2. Committee constituted to oversee clean air programme

Context:

The Union Environment Ministry has constituted a committee to implement the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), which aims to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20%-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

- The committee will be chaired by the Secretary, Union Environment Ministry and has among its members the Joint Secretary (Thermal), Ministry of Power; Director-General, The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), the Delhi-based think-tank; and Professor Sachidananda Tripathi, Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur (IIT-K).
- The NCAP unveiled in January is envisaged as a scheme to provide the States and the Centre with a framework to combat air pollution.
- The committee would be headquartered in New Delhi
- Its remit includes ensuring inter-ministerial organisation and cooperation, sharing information and

resolving issues that could arise between ministries.

- The committee would also give overall guidance and directions to effectively implement the programmes.
- The NCAP is envisioned as a five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year. There would be a review every five years.

Details:

- The World Health Organisation's (WHO) database on air pollution over the years has listed Tier I and Tier II Indian cities as some of the most polluted places in the world.
- In 2018, 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities were in India.
- States in which the cities are located are expected to produce plans that include increasing the number of monitoring stations, providing technology support, conducting source apportionment studies, and strengthening enforcement.
- For achieving the NCAP targets, the cities would be expected to calculate the reduction in pollution, keeping 2017's average annual PM levels as the base year.
- The NCAP requires cities to implement specific measures such as "ensuring roads are pothole-free to improve traffic flow and thereby reduce dust" (within 60 days) or "ensuring strict action against unauthorised brick kilns" (within 30 days).

Criticisms:

- Experts have criticised the lack of mandatory targets and the challenge of inadequate enforcement by cities.
- It doesn't specify an exact date for when these obligations kick in.

3. Genes of climate-resistant chickpea varieties identified

Context:

An international team led by the Hyderabad-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has identified in chickpea four important genes for heat tolerance and three important genes for drought tolerance.

Significance:

- With rising temperatures and increasing climatic fluctuations due to climate change, the identification of these climate-resistant genes will help in developing newer chickpea varieties which can tolerate temperatures up to 38°C.
- Also, the identification of other genes with important agronomic traits will help in increasing the yield and providing better resistance to pests and diseases.
- With the identification of the heat- and drought-tolerant genes, it will be possible to cross a chickpea landrace carrying those genes with a variety and select only those lines (progenies) with the genetic markers that have the heat and drought tolerance genes.
- By using such genomics-assisted breeding approach, the time taken to produce a new heat- and drought-tolerant chickpea variety can be halved from about eight to four years.
- When heat-tolerant chickpeas are developed in future, farmers in India may have a possibility to go in for a second round of cropping. Though the yield will be less for the second crop, farmers will still stand to gain

Details:

- The study was based on complete genome sequencing of 429 chickpea lines from 45 countries.

- More than 90% of chickpea cultivation area is in South Asia, including India.
- Globally, more than 70% yield is lost due to drought and increasing temperatures.
- Chickpea is a cool season crop, so in general any further increase in temperature is expected to further reduce the yield.
- The study has found that chickpea originated in the Mediterranean/south-west Asia and migrated to south Asia.
- It reached India about two centuries ago, apparently through Afghanistan.
- In parallel, it migrated from the Mediterranean to east Africa and central Asia. The study provides insights into chickpea's genetic diversity, domestication too.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Drug-resistant diseases could kill 10 million a year by 2050

Context:

Drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050, warned the UN Ad Hoc Interagency Coordinating Group on Antimicrobial Resistance in a report released.

Drug Resistance:

- Drug resistance is the reduction in effectiveness of a medication such as an antimicrobial or an antineoplastic in treating a disease or condition.
- The term is used in the context of resistance that pathogens or cancers have "acquired", that is, resistance has evolved.
- Antimicrobial resistance challenge clinical care.
- When an organism is resistant to more than one drug, it is said to be multidrug-resistant.
- The development of antibiotic resistance in particular stems from the drugs targeting only specific bacterial molecules (almost always proteins). Because the drug is so specific, any mutation in these molecules will interfere with or negate its destructive effect, resulting in antibiotic resistance.
- Furthermore there is mounting concern over the abuse of antibiotics in the farming of livestock leading to development of super-resistant bacteria.

Details:

- The report states that, by 2030, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty.
- Currently, at least 7,00,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases, including 2,30,000 people who die from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.
- It also noted that more and more common diseases, including respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections, are becoming untreatable; lifesaving medical procedures are becoming riskier, and food systems are getting increasingly precarious.

Recommendations:

- The report noted that the world is already feeling the economic and health consequences as crucial medicines become ineffective.
- Without investment from countries in all income brackets, future generations will face the disastrous impacts of uncontrolled antimicrobial resistance.
- It has recommended that countries prioritise national action plans to scale-up financing and capacity-building efforts.
- Countries must put in place stronger regulatory systems and support awareness programs for

responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials by professionals in human, animal and plant health and invest in ambitious research and development for new technologies to combat antimicrobial resistance.

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E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. No good options in Afghanistan

Editorial Analysis:

A brief look at the past:

- Experts opine that during the last 50 years, Afghanistan has been through different governance systems — monarchy till 1973; communist type rule, initially home-grown and then imposed by the U.S.S.R. with its 1979 intervention; jihadi warlordism in the early 1990s; shariat-based Taliban rule; and a democratic republic based on a presidential system since 2004.
- Further, wracked by a growing Taliban insurgency, peace today remains elusive.
- Reconciliation with the Taliban is increasingly projected as the way forward.
- However, ‘reconciliation’ means different things to different players and to different groups of Afghans.

Negotiating a U.S. exit

- It is important to note that the U.S. began its operations in Afghanistan, primarily against the al-Qaeda, 18 years ago.
- As it set about creating new institutional structures in Afghanistan, supported by the international community, U.S. troop presence began to grow.
- From a few thousand in 2002, the numbers increased and stabilised around 20,000 between 2004 and 2006 when they started climbing.
- However, by 2010, it had spiked to 1,00,000, dropping to 10,000 in 2016 and currently numbers around 15,000.

The costs incurred by the U.S.

- The cumulative cost has been over \$800 billion on the U.S. deployments and \$105 billion on rebuilding Afghanistan, with nearly 2,400 American soldiers dead.

Donald Trump’s Policy:

- It is important to note that **S. President Donald Trump’s policy announced in August 2017 was aimed at breaking the military stalemate** by authorising a small increase in U.S. presence, removing operational constraints, putting Pakistan on notice, improving governance and strengthening the capabilities of Afghan security forces.
- However, experts opine that within a year, the policy failure was apparent.
- Afghan government continued to lose territory and today controls less than half the country. Since

2015, Afghan security forces have suffered 45,000 casualties with over 3,000 civilians killed every year.

- Last year (2018), U.S. senior officials travelled to Doha to open talks with the Taliban, followed by the appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation.
- Five rounds of talks have been held and a sixth is likely soon.
- Khalilzad (who is a US diplomat and the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the Department of State) is seeking guarantees that the Taliban will not provide safe haven to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Afghan territory will not be used to launch strikes against the U.S., while the Taliban have demanded a date for U.S. withdrawal along with the release of all Taliban detainees in Guantánamo and Afghanistan.
- Khalilzad has also sought a ceasefire in Afghanistan and engagement in an intra-Afghan dialogue in return.
- The Taliban have responded with their new spring offensive, al-Fath, and refuse to engage with the Afghan government.
- **An intra-Afghan dialogue with political and civil society leaders** planned for around the third week of the month of May, 2019 in Doha was called off on account of the presence of Afghan officials.
- Experts opine that it is clear that Mr. Khalilzad is not negotiating peace in Afghanistan; he is negotiating a managed U.S. exit.
- Given the blood and treasure expended, the optics of the exit is important.
- As former U.S. Defence Secretary J. Mattis said, **“The U.S. doesn’t lose wars, it loses interest”**.

Increasing polarisation: A Brief Look at the political history

- It is important to note that there is growing polarisation in Afghanistan along ethnic and even sectarian divides.
- With three presidential elections (in 2004, 2009 and 2014) and three parliamentary elections (in 2005, 2010 and 2018), faith in the electoral process and the election machinery has eroded.
- The 2009 presidential election showed the growing mistrust between then President Hamid Karzai and Washington.
- The U.S. kept pushing Mr. Karzai to agree to a second round between him and his rival Abdullah Abdullah despite Mr. Karzai’s insistence that he had won more than 50% votes in the first round.
- After months of wrangling when Mr. Karzai agreed, Dr. Abdullah backed out and Mr. Karzai felt that his second term had been tarnished.
- The 2014 election yielded a disputed result with neither Ashraf Ghani nor Dr. Abdullah willing to concede. Despite an audit, results were never declared.
- Instead, the U.S.-backed political compromise produced a National Unity Government (NUG) with Ashraf Ghani as President and Dr. Abdullah as CEO, a position never legitimised by the promised constitutional amendment. The NUG has aggravated polarisation and has often found itself paralysed.
- The 2019 presidential election, due in April 2019, has been postponed twice, to July and now to September 28th, 2019.
- This may have been pushed by the U.S. to give time to Mr. Khalilzad for his talks, but any further postponement will not be accepted by the people in view of the eroding legitimacy of the NUG.
- It is important to note that parliamentary elections due in 2015 were finally held in October 2018 even though the promised electoral reforms remained unimplemented.
- Under the circumstances, the results have yet to be declared six months later, further delegitimising the process.
- Experts opine that together with the deteriorating security situation, the prospects for a credible and legitimate election in September, 2019 seem remote.
- This is why there is growing support among certain Afghan sections for an interim government. Such an arrangement would prepare the ground for fresh elections after constitutional amendments and

electoral reforms using the **Loya Jirga process** (a grand assembly of tribal elders) over the next two years.

- As a matter of fact, recently, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani opened a Loya Jirga, which is a grand assembly of tribal elders, to discuss the on-going peace talks between the Taliban and the United States.
- Expectedly, this is strongly opposed by the more secular and liberal Afghan groups, including women, which see any such move as a step back from the democratic principles of the 2004 constitution.
- The real risk is that as Western funding for salaries and equipment dries up and political legitimacy of Kabul erodes, the cohesiveness of the Afghan security forces will be impacted.

Elusive peace

- Just as there is no domestic consensus on the terms of reconciliation with the Taliban, there is a breakdown of regional consensus too.
- Khalilzad met with his Russian and Chinese counterparts in Moscow where the three reiterated support for “an inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process”.
- However, there is no common understanding of what it means or which Afghans should own and lead the process.
- The NUG feels abandoned and has blamed Mr. Khalilzad of betraying the Afghan government; the U.S. has demanded an apology from the Afghan NSA, Hamdullah Mohib, for his outburst against the U.S.

Viewpoints of Russia and China:

- Moscow has its own format for talks and is convinced that the U.S.-backed experiment of the NUG needs to end — the sooner the better.
- Chinese interest is primarily with securing its Xinjiang province and the Belt and Road Initiative projects in the region.

The Pakistan factor:

- Pakistan is once again centre-stage as the country with maximum leverage.
- To demonstrate its support, Pakistan released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a leader and founder of the Taliban, after keeping him in custody for nearly nine years.
- Ironically, he was picked up because he had opened direct talks with the Karzai government a decade ago and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was furious when it learnt about it.
- The ISI’s investment in providing safe haven to the Taliban for 18 years is finally paying off as the U.S. negotiates its exit while the Taliban negotiate their return.
- A sense of triumphalism was visible in Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan’s recent statement suggesting the formation of an interim government in Kabul to overcome the hurdles in the Doha talks provoking a furious backlash from Afghanistan from the government and the opposition figures. Even Mr. Khalilzad dubbed the statement as ‘inappropriate’.
- Pakistan has since backtracked but it shows that old habits die hard.
- Even without getting into details of why the post-Bonn order in Afghanistan is fraying, **there is agreement that peace in Afghanistan cannot be restored by military action.**
- It is also clear that a prolonged U.S. military presence is not an answer.
- The problem is that a U.S. withdrawal will end the U.S. war in Afghanistan but without a domestic and regional consensus, it will not bring peace to Afghanistan.
- Unfortunately, today there are no good options in Afghanistan.

2. Line of confidence

Editorial Analysis:

Line of Control (LoC): A Line of commerce and co-operation

- Experts have opined that in the last decade, the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir has often been re-interpreted as the line of commerce and co-operation.
- This paradigm shift was the result of initiation of two confidence-building measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan — cross-LoC trade and cross-LoC travel.
- It was representative of a constructive bilateral engagement process in the midst of political upheavals.
- Stakeholders were hopeful that while cross-LoC travel would connect divided families, cross-LoC trade would foster economic ties between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) that would eventually help reap the peace dividend.

Step taken by the Government:

- In the month of April, 2019, the government of India announced the suspension from midnight of trade at the two designated points expressing concerns over **‘illegal inflows of weapons, narcotics and currency’ in the country.** ‘
- A stricter regulatory regime’ is expected for re-initiation of trade.

A Look at Specifics:

- It is important to note that cross-LoC trade is an intra-Jammu and Kashmir trade, in the form of barter of goods on a reciprocal basis.
- Started on October 21, 2008, the trade has been conducted through a standard operating procedure (SOP) mutually agreed by New Delhi and Islamabad.
- The SOP enlists the 21 categories of items to be traded on zero tariffs.
- LoC trade takes place four days a week, wherein traders are allowed to exchange 70 trucks per day.
- The trade-in (import) and trade-out (export) goods have to be balanced to zero for each trading firm within a period of three months.

What does the data show?

- The total number of traders registered at the Salamabad Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC), Uri, and Chakan-da-Bagh TFC, Poonch, is approximately 600.
- Since 2008, trade has shown an average year-on-year growth of about 19%, reaching a cumulative value of over ₹6,500 crore to date.
- Furthermore, it has generated more than 1.6 lakh job days.
- To date, more than 1 lakh trucks laden with goods have been exchanged, generating approximate freight revenue of ₹66.50 crore for transporters of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Experts opine that these figures are indicative of the potential that this trade holds for social and economic development within Jammu and Kashmir.

Areas that need to be remedied:

- Despite its success in generating economic benefits, the operational and policy level deficiencies render the trade vulnerable to misconceptions and malpractices.
- Lack of clarity in the SOP towards rules of origin, items list, goods and services tax (GST)/local taxation mechanisms are some of the limitations.
- To further exemplify, a practice of ‘trade number selling’ was prevalent at the TFCs wherein few trading firms sell their registration/token numbers to other trading firms to send the latter’s goods

across the LoC out of turn in the roster system.

- This practice has created a gap between the number of genuine traders and traders involved only in ‘trade number selling’.
- The issue is compounded by the presence of ‘**seasonal traders**’, that is, traders who are active only for few months, thereby **leaving a negative balance overall in the barter trade**.
- These issues, coupled with a number of infrastructural issues such as a non-functional weighbridge, lack of CCTV cameras and truck scanners, and an absence of regular communication channels warrant reforms in the trade practices.
- The unexpected suspension of the trade has affected locals. Traders have incurred significant losses as most of the goods were in transit while some goods were sold at a lower price in the local markets of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Traders who were awaiting the trade-in goods in exchange of the goods sent earlier have also incurred heavy losses and a negative trade balance against their firms.

Concluding Remarks: The Way Forward

- Experts opine that streamlining LoC trade would require both infrastructural and policy level interventions.
- Firstly, a revision in the SOP is required to highlight the trader re-registration process; we need clarity on the ‘rules of origin’ of goods; tradeable commodities need to be identified that will benefit the local economy of Jammu and Kashmir, and further **eight-digit HS (harmonised system) codes must be assigned to ensure clarity on the items**.
- The SOP must also specify the modality of movement of trucks across the LoC as well as clarity on filing of GST/other local taxes.
- **A token system on a first-come-first-serve basis should be explored**. This will check the misuse of trade registration number in the roster system.
- Secondly, digitisation of the TFCs must take place to make the process of record keeping easy, transparent and accessible to various regulatory agencies.
- Thirdly, the digitised TFCs should be enabled with a ‘trader notification system’ for timely reminders to achieve zero barter balance for continuation of trade.
- Fourthly, in case of non-compliance, a strict ‘trader de-listing policy’ needs to be put in place wherein any trader with a negative balance in barter for more than the designated time period can be suspended from conducting trade.
- Fifthly, regular meetings must also be held between the trade facilitation officers of both sides of the LoC to ensure co-ordination of such activities and exchange of the list of suspended/banned traders.
- Finally, infrastructure upgradation such as installation of truck scanners, functional CCTV cameras for security, and calibration of weighbridges, are essential to check the inflow of banned items, narcotics and weapons.
- The gains made by India and Pakistan through initiation of cross-LoC trade and travel have manifested themselves in the form of recent talks of **opening the Sharda Peeth corridor in PoK as another CBM**.
- An important lesson is to be learnt here, optics and rhetoric aside, is that the sustenance of a CBM requires regular policy and operational-level interventions.

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. For a malnutrition-free India (Government Interventions)

Note to Students:

- The key emphasis of this article is on malnutrition. We have also added a section in this analysis that

covers the important government schemes aimed at alleviating malnutrition in India.

Background:

A Look at some of the Government Schemes:

Government has taken various measures to check malnutrition in the people living Below Poverty Line (BPL) and the tribals which are as follows:

1. Promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices that include early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months of age **through ASHA worker and health care provider at health facilities**. Under “MAA” programme of MoHFW, impetus on capacity building of the health workers on lactation management at both community and facility levels and 360 degree IEC campaign to create awareness regarding breastfeeding is being carried out.
2. Treatment of sick children with severe acute malnutrition at special units called **the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs)**, set up at public health facilities.
3. **Vitamin A supplementation** for children aged 6 months to 5 years and **iron and folic acid supplementation** is being carried out for children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women through life cycle approach under “**National Iron Plus Initiative**” programme. Also, **promotion of intake of iodised salt** is being carried out under **National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Programme**.
4. **Village Health and Nutrition Days and Mother and Child Protection Card** are the joint initiative of the Ministries of Health & Family welfare and the Ministry of Woman and Child for addressing the nutrition concerns in children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. **Monthly Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND)** are monthly days held at village level in Anganwadi centre to increase the awareness and bring about desired changes in the dietary practices including the promotion of breastfeeding.
5. Under the **RashtriyaBalSwasthyaKaryakram (RBSK)** and **Rashtriya Kishore SwasthyaKaryakram (RKSK)**, systematic efforts are undertaken to detect nutrition deficiency among children and adolescents respectively.
6. Supplementary Nutrition in form of **hot-cooked meals and take-home ration provided to children aged 6 months to 6 years under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme**, Growth monitoring of children aged 0-5 years on a monthly basis at Anganwadi Centres.
7. **Mid-day meal** is provided for all students enrolled in Government and Government aided schools.
 - It is important to note that the Government is implementing several schemes and programs like:
 1. Anganwadi Services,
 2. Scheme for Adolescent Girls and
 3. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna** under the Umbrella **Integrated Child Development Services Scheme** as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.
 - All these schemes address one or other aspects related to nutrition and have the potential to improve nutritional outcomes in the country.
 - Malnutrition is not a direct cause of death but contributes to mortality and morbidity by reducing resistance to infections.
 - There are a number of causes of death of children such as prematurity, low birth weight, pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases, non-communicable diseases, birth asphyxia & birth trauma, injuries, congenital anomalies, acute bacterial sepsis and severe infections, etc.

Perspective on National Nutrition Mission (NNM):

- Apart from the existing schemes aimed at reduction in the levels of malnutrition among women and child, recently, the Government has set up the **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)** for improving the nutritional indicators of children and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

What does the **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)** aim to do?

- The Mission aims to prevent and reduce prevalence of stunting among children (0-6 years) in the country by 6%, under-nutrition (underweight) prevalence among children (0-6 years) by 6%, prevalence of anaemia among children (6-59 m) by 9%, prevalence of anaemia among women (15-49 years) by 9% and reduction in prevalence of low birth weight by 6%.
- The Goals set under the mission will be achieved by ensuring convergence with various programmes; incentivizing States/ UTs; IT enabled Real Time Monitoring (ICT-RTM) by using Smart Phones and Tablets; Evaluation; Community mobilisation awareness advocacy; IEC, Online Course on Nutrition for Children, Nutrition message from folk songs and songs on WASH, and strengthening human resource, etc.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that in this election season, it is important to keep promises made not just to voters, but also those made to improve the lives of children, the future of the nation.
- Despite programme commitments since 1975, such as creating **Integrated Child Development Services** and national coverage of the **mid-day meal scheme**, India continues to grapple with a high rate of under-nutrition.

Stunting: A Major Challenge Area

- Improving nutrition and managing stunting continue to be big challenges, and they can be addressed only with an inter-sectoral strategy.
- **Stunting** has lifelong consequences on human capital, poverty and equity.
- It leads to less potential in education and fewer professional opportunities.
- According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4, India has unacceptably high levels of stunting, despite marginal improvement over the years.
- In 2015-16, 38.4% of children below five years were stunted and 35.8% were underweight. India ranks 158 out of 195 countries on the human capital index.
- It is important to note that a lack of investment in health and education leads to slower economic growth.
- The World Bank says, “A 1% loss in adult height due to childhood stunting is associated with a 1.4% loss in economic productivity”.
- Stunting also has lasting effects on future generations.
- Since 53.1% of women were anaemic in 2015-16, this will have lasting effects on their future pregnancies and children. The situation further worsens when infants are fed inadequate diets.

Some of the Ambitious goals that have been set:

- The aim of the **National Nutrition Strategy of 2017** is to achieve a malnutrition-free India by 2022.
- The plan is to reduce stunting prevalence in children (0-3 years) by about three percentage points per year by 2022 from NFHS-4 levels, and achieve a one-third reduction in anaemia in children, adolescents and women of reproductive age.
- This is an ambitious goal, especially given that the decadal decline in stunting from 48% in 2006 to 38.4% in 2016 is only one percentage point a year.
- This promise calls for serious alignment among line ministries, convergence of nutrition

programmes, and stringent monitoring of the progress made in achieving these goals.

- The data available on stunting tell us where to concentrate future programmes.
- Stunting prevalence tends to increase with age and peaks at 18-23 months.
- Timely nutritional interventions of breastfeeding, age-appropriate complementary feeding, full immunisation, and Vitamin A supplementation have been proven effective in improving outcomes in children.
- However, data show that only 41.6% children are breastfed within one hour of birth, 54.9% are exclusively breastfed for six months, 42.7% are provided timely complementary foods, and only 9.6% children below two years receive an adequate diet. India must improve in these areas.
- Vitamin A deficiency can increase infections like measles and diarrhoeal diseases.
- About 40% of children don't get full immunisation and Vitamin A supplementation. They must be provided these for disease prevention.

Variations across States and districts

- According to NFHS-4 data, **India has more stunted children in rural areas as compared to urban areas**, possibly due to the low socio-economic status of households in those areas.
- Almost double the prevalence of stunting is found in children born to mothers with no schooling as compared to mothers with 12 or more years of schooling.
- Stunting shows a steady decline with increase in household income.
- The inter-generational cycle of malnutrition is to be tackled with effective interventions for both mother (pre- and post-pregnancy) and child, to address the high burden of stunting.
- In terms of geographical regions, Bihar (48%), Uttar Pradesh (46%) and Jharkhand (45%) have very high rates of stunting, while States with the lowest rates include Kerala, and Goa (20%).
- While nutrition has improved across all States, **inter-State variabilities remain extremely high**. The most significant decline has been noted in Chhattisgarh (a 15 percentage point drop in the last decade). Thus, the government can take lessons from Chhattisgarh. The least progress has been made in Tamil Nadu.
- A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute shows that stunting prevalence varies across districts (12.4-65.1%), and almost 40% districts have stunting levels above 40%. U.P. tops the list, with six out of 10 districts having the highest rates of stunting.

Concluding Remarks:

- Looking at this data, it is imperative to push for convergence of health and nutrition programmes right from pregnancy until the child reaches five years of age.
- This is doable.
- India must adopt a multi-pronged approach in bringing about socio-behavioural change.
- What is really needed is effective monitoring and implementation of programmes to address malnutrition.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. An insidious poll trend

Editorial Analysis:

- In this general election, the Election Commission has confiscated cash, gold and silver, liquor, drugs and other items worth ₹3,205 crore, according to data published by the constitutional body on April 27, 2019 before the fourth phase in the seven phase-election began.
- Experts opine that at this rate, **we can expect more than twice this amount to be confiscated by the time the election comes to an end.**

- **This amount is much more than what was confiscated by the EC during the 2014 Lok Sabha election.**
- What is confiscated is likely to be less than 5% of what is being spent by all the candidates and parties in this election.
- **The total expenditure of this election is estimated to be about ₹50,000 crore, which is the highest amount for any election in the world.**

No Voices Raised: A worrying trend?

- Some experts opine that no political party or leader so far has expressed concern about this trend and its threat to the fundamentals of our republic.
- Instead, **candidates continue accusing each other of giving more cash for votes.**
- Some experts had pointed out based on field studies in 2009-2014 that the more the media coverage and the higher the number of crorepati candidates in the contest, the more the money that is expected by the voters. This is exactly what is happening today.
- We should be concerned even more that the trend is no longer limited to being predominant in the southern States (other than Kerala), but has now become significant elsewhere too.
- **According to the EC, if gold, drugs, liquor and cash are taken together, the total seizure is highest in Tamil Nadu by a wide margin, followed by Gujarat, Delhi, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.**
- On confiscated cash alone, Tamil Nadu again tops the list, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal and Maharashtra. Uttar Pradesh too is in the cash-for-votes race.
- Two large-scale baseline studies of the Centre for Media Studies in 2005 and 2007 in 20-plus States and select studies since then in every round of elections reliably indicate that cash distribution occurred and may be on the rise irrespective of the socio-economic status of the recipients and the area in which they reside (urban or rural).
- However, **unless the demand side is addressed too, no policy initiative is likely to make a difference.**

Concluding Remarks:

- In this unusual paradigm how can we restore true representative democracy?
- One option is for the news media to play a positive and proactive role, which would require media houses to extricate themselves from conflicts of interest.
- The same could be said of corporates, which have become a major source of funding formally, yet there is also likely to be a strong informal nexus.
- Unless a course correction is made soon, the 2019 Lok Sabha polls will go down as a watershed election for the wrong reasons.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Cyclone Idai is a Tropical Cyclone.
2. The cyclone has been named by Zimbabwe.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

Cyclone Idai hit the port city of Beira in Mozambique. It is a tropical cyclone and was named by Zimbabwe.

Q2) Consider the following statements:

1. Bogibeel river bridge is the longest rail-cum-road bridge in India.
2. It is the first rail-cum-road bridge built over the Brahmaputra River in Assam.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a

Explanation:

Saraighat Bridge is the first rail-cum-road bridge constructed over the Brahmaputra River in Assam.

Q3) Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary is located in:

- a. Karnataka
- b. Tamil Nadu
- c. Telangana
- d. Andhra Pradesh

Answer: a

Explanation:

The Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary is a protected area located in Karnataka. It was established as Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in 1987 under Section 18 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1973 with the objective of providing protection, conservation and development of Wildlife and its environment.

Q4) Which of these states shares its border with Myanmar and Bangladesh?

- a. Mizoram
- b. Tripura

- c. Meghalaya
- d. Assam

Answer: a

Explanation:

Self-explanatory

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Antimicrobial resistance is one of the greatest threats we face as a global community. Explain the response needed to curb its rise and protect a century of progress in health. (15 Marks 250 Words)
2. India will need pragmatism, diplomatic skill in shaping new rules for regulation of outer space. What are the issues that demand India's attention? Elucidate. (15 Marks 250 Words)

