

25 Dec 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Union Cabinet clears NPR update, census

Context:

Union cabinet's approval for the National Population Register (NPR).

Background:

- The **Citizenship Rules, 2003**, state that the **Centre**, by issuing an order, **can decide a date to prepare the NPR**.
- **The NPR was first started in 2010**, along with the house-listing phase of the [Census of India, 2011](#).
- **The data was updated in 2015** through a door to door survey, and its digitization has also been carried out.
- It had been decided to update the NPR, along with the house-listing phase of Census 2021, from April to September 2020 in all states and UTs, except Assam.

Details:

- A meeting of the Union Cabinet has approved over ₹3,941.35 crores for updating **the National Population Register (NPR) across the country, barring Assam**, and ₹8,754.23 crores for conducting the **Census of India, 2021**.
- **The decennial census will be conducted in two phases — house listing and housing census from April to September 2020**, and population enumeration from February 9 to 28, 2021.
- The NPR will be updated along with House Listing and Housing Census except in Assam.

For more information on this topic refer:

[CNA dated Dec 21, 2019](#)

2. NPR data was first collected in 2010

Context:

Union cabinet's approval for the National Population Register.

Background:

- The data for the National Population Register (NPR) was first collected in 2010.
- **The NPR was updated in 2015 by seeding it with biometric details of Aadhaar**.
- The data under NPR was collected through door-to-door enumeration under various categories like age, marital status, place of birth, nationality (as declared), present and permanent residential address, occupation, activity and educational qualification.
- West Bengal and Kerala have decided to put on hold the proceedings for **updating the National Population Register (NPR)**. The States declined to update NPR amid apprehensions that it will be followed by the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Details:

- In the past, **NPR household data was provided to several State governments for the Public Distribution System (PDS)**.
- The States which have used the NPR data collected by the Registrar General of India (RGI) on behalf of the Centre were **West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Manipur and Rajasthan**. They have used the information available for **planning various beneficiary schemes**.
- The register was being updated for **efficient delivery of social benefits** by linking it with various government schemes.
- Government sources state that the **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is based on the NPR data**.
- Household-wise NPR data was used in better targeting of schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, Jan

Dhan Yojana, Prime Minister Awas Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, [Saubhagya](#), etc.

- An archived page on censusindia.gov.in says that a proposal to issue Resident Identity Cards to all usual residents in the NPR, of 18 years of age and above, is under consideration of the Government. This proposed identity card would be a smart card and would bear the Aadhaar number.

3. Is govt. right in denying NPR-NRC link?

Context:

Union cabinet's approval for the National Population Register.

Details:

The link between NPR and NRC:

- **Section 14A of the Citizenship Act** empowers the government to compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue an identity card and to **maintain a 'National Register of Indian Citizens'**.
- It also provides for the creation of a **National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC), or the National Register of Citizens (NRC)** that will flow from the data gathered in the NPR. The citizenship register is **generated out of the NPR database**.
- **The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Card) Rules, 2003**, introduced the term 'Population Register' and said that particulars collected in the population register shall be verified and scrutinised for the purpose of preparation and inclusion in the citizenship register.
- The Rules inserted in 2003 to the Citizenship Act, 1955 says that **NRC will be prepared at the local, district, state and national level after verifying the details in the NPR and establishing the citizenship of each individual**.
- According to the Rules, a person's citizenship status will be decided by local officials — whether or not the person will figure in the NRIC. **No new law or rules are needed to conduct this exercise across the country.**

Should NPR be followed up by NRC?

- **The Act says the government may maintain a national register of Indian citizens.** It is possible to argue that preparing a citizenship register out of NPR data is not mandatory.
- It is possible that the government may not establish a citizenship register. The first NPR exercise did not result in the creation of a citizenship database.
- However, **the 2003 Rules mandate the Registrar General of India**, who is also the Registrar General of Citizenship Registration, **to establish and maintain the National Citizenship Register.**
- The Centre is also mandated by the rules to carry out a house-to-house enumeration and collection of particulars related to every individual and family, including citizenship status.

Documents and biometrics collection during NPR:

- In the initial phase, details may be accepted based on self-declaration.
- If a citizenship register is to be generated, scrutiny of documentary proof may become necessary. Biometrics were collected during the last NPR for some, and biometrics collected for Aadhaar were used for others.
- **As Aadhaar coverage saturation is close to 98%, it is possible to dispense with the collection of biometrics during NPR for most residents.**

Objectives of NPR:

- NPR is being updated for efficient delivery of welfare and social benefits under government schemes.
- This was the original objective of NPR, but with **Aadhaar being introduced and backed by an Act, which mandates linking of subsidies and welfare schemes to possessing an Aadhaar number**, it may not be correct to argue that NPR is needed for efficient delivery of benefits any more.

For more information on this topic refer:

[CNA dated 22 Dec 2019](#)

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. India in the midst of significant slowdown: IMF

Context:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on India.

Details:

- In its report, the IMF Directors noted that India's rapid economic expansion in recent years has lifted millions of people out of poverty. However, **in the first half of 2019, a combination of factors led to subdued economic growth in India.**
- **India is now in the midst of a significant economic slowdown**, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said, urging the government to take urgent policy actions to address the current prolonged downturn.

Concerns:

- The issue in India is the **growth slowdown**. Though there are indications that it is mostly **cyclical, not structural**, still concerns remain as because of the financial sector issues, the **recovery will be not as quick as it is in case of cyclical slowdowns.**
- The staff report was done in August 2019 when the IMF was not fully aware of India's current economic slowdown. Growth in the second quarter of FY 2019-20 came in at a six-year low of 4.5% (year-on-year), and the composition of growth indicates that private domestic demand expanded by only 1% in the quarter. Most high-frequency indicators suggest that weak economic activity has continued into December.
- **The new growth projections for India, which will come out in January 2020, would be significantly lower than the previous ones.**

Likely causes:

- The current economic slowdown is attributed to the **abrupt reduction in non-banking financial companies' credit expansion** and the associated **broad-based tightening of credit conditions** appears to be an important factor and **weak income growth**, especially rural, has been **affecting private consumption.**
- **Private investment has been hindered by financial sector difficulties** (including in public sector banks) and **insufficient business confidence.** Some **implementation issues** with important and appropriate structural reforms, such as the nation-wide Goods and Services Tax, may also have

played a role.

Positives:

- India is still doing well in terms of other economic parameters.
- **Foreign Reserves** have risen to a record level.
- **The current account deficit** has narrowed.
- **Inflation**, although witnessing a temporary hike because of vegetable prices, has been under control for the last few years.
- The issue is primarily how to address the growth slowdown.

Way forward:

- The economic recovery will not be quick and there is a need for **urgent policy actions from the government**.
- With risks to the outlook tilted to the downside, the IMF has called for continued **sound macroeconomic management**. There is an opportunity with the strong mandate of the new government to **reinvigorate the reform agenda to boost inclusive and sustainable growth**.
- In the short term, the most critical thing is carrying out **reforms in the financial sector**.

2. Economic revival key to banks' health

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India's report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19.

Details:

Positives:

- The report states that the **Indian banking sector's financial parameters such as bad loans and capital adequacy have shown an improvement** in recent times.
- The report noted that during 2018-19, **the asset quality of scheduled commercial banks turned around** after a gap of seven years with the **overhang of stressed assets declining and fresh slippages arrested**.
- As a result of declining provisioning requirement, **the banking sector returned to profitability** in the first half of 2019-20. Besides, recapitalization had helped public sector banks in **shoring up their capital ratios**.

Concerns:

Link with Economic growth:

- The report, however, also notes that **the overall health of the banking sector will depend on revival in economic growth**. The health of the banking sector hinges around a turnaround in macroeconomic conditions. The growth slowdown of the country intensified with **GDP growth for the second quarter of the current financial year dipping to a six-year low of 4.5%**.

Risk-averse Nature:

- Despite the improvement in some of the important parameters, **the risk-averse nature among lenders was worrisome**. The waning of banks' confidence in extending loans is worrisome, the

Reserve Bank says in its report.

Credit slowdown:

- **The slowdown of credit flow to the commercial sector** in the first half of 2019-20 was evidence of the aversion to risk.

Impeding the recovery in financial sectors:

- This waning of confidence leading to credit slowdown is weighing on the overall economic activity. This is worrisome as it is taking hold at a time when **the recent improvements in asset quality and profitability of the banking sector are at a nascent stage** and capital ratios of public sector banks (PSBs) are shored up due to recapitalization by the government.

Way forward:

- **The capital infusion by the government in public sector banks is ‘just enough’ to meet the regulatory minimum, including capital conservation buffer.** The banks’ capacity to sustain credit growth in consonance with the financing requirements of the economy will, however, warrant that capital is maintained well above the regulatory minimum, providing these banks confidence to assume the risk and to lend. This **might require more recapitalization.**
- Noting that recapitalisation would be a continuous process, the report states that going forward, **the financial health of PSBs should increasingly be assessed by their ability to access capital markets** rather than looking to the government as a recapitalizer of the first and last resort.

3. Strict governance norms for banks soon, says RBI

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India’s report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19.

Background:

- The **recent governance failures in some financial entities** have brought to the fore **the impact of the quality of corporate governance on efficiency in the allocation of resources as well as on financial stability.**

Details:

- The [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](https://byjus.com) is planning to issue **fresh corporate governance norms** which will be in line with global best practices.
- The RBI in its Trend and Progress Report of Banking in India 2018-19, notes that the **growing size and complexity of the Indian financial system** underscores the significance of strengthening corporate governance standards in regulated entities.

Way forward:

- The RBI in the process of issuing draft guidelines on corporate governance for regulated entities, the objective of which is to **align the current regulatory framework with global best practices**, must be **mindful of the context of the domestic financial system.**
- In the case of **cooperative banks**, there is a pressing need for an **umbrella organisation for the sector, which can provide liquidity and capital support to member-banks.** The RBI has given

approval for its formation. There is a need to ensure that its formation serves the intended purpose.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Chief of Defence Staff gets govt. nod

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the **creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)**.

Background:

- The creation of the post of CDS has been a **long pending demand and forms part of higher-level military reforms**.
- The Prime Minister in his Independence Day address of 2019 had announced the appointment of a CDS. Thereafter, **an implementation committee** was constituted to finalize the exact responsibilities and an enabling framework for the post of CDS.
- **The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) had approved the recommendations of the committee**, headed by the National Security Adviser, on the **role and charter of the CDS**.

Details:

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved the creation of the post of CDS in the **rank of a four-star General**, with salary and perquisites equivalent to a service chief.
- The government has previously informed the Parliament that the CDS would come in the **ambit of 'Right to Information Act'**, in accordance with the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005.

Responsibilities of CDS:

- The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), will function as **the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister and also as the Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC)**.
- In his capacity as the Permanent Chairman, COSC, the CDS would **administer tri-Services organisations, agencies and commands related to Cyber and Space**.
- In the strategic domain, the CDS would function as the **"Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority"** chaired by the Prime Minister.

Department of Military Affairs:

- The CDS will also **head the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), to be created in the Ministry of Defence, and function as its Secretary**.
- The armed forces will be brought under the ambit of the DMA and will deal with works relating to the three Services and procurement exclusive to the Services, except capital acquisitions, as per prevalent rules and procedures.

Acquisition:

- The CDS will also be a **member of the Defence Acquisition Council** chaired by the Defence Minister.

Long term Planning:

- The CDS will be a **member of the Defence Planning Committee chaired by the NSA.**

Hierarchy:

- **The CDS will be above the three service chiefs in the hierarchy structure.**
- The CDS will act as the Principal Military Adviser to Defence Minister on all tri-Services matters. However, the three Chiefs will continue to advise the Minister on matters exclusively concerning their respective Services. **The CDS would not exercise any military command, including over the Service Chiefs.**

Significance:

Integrating operations:

- The broad mandate of the CDS includes bringing about **jointness in “operations, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance of the three Services, within three years of the first CDS assuming office.”**

Optimisation of resources:

- A major task of the CDS is to bring about **synergy and optimise procurements, training and logistics.**
- Apart from implementing the long-term capital acquisition plans, the functions of the CDS include assigning “Inter-Services prioritization to capital acquisition proposals based on the anticipated budget.”
- CDS will facilitate a **restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through the establishment of joint/theatre commands.**

Disaster relief operations:

- Interestingly, the CDS would also **evaluate plans “for 'Out of Area Contingencies', as well as other contingencies such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).”**

Category: INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Railway Board revamp will see cut in strength

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the restructuring of the Railway Board.

Details:

- **The Union Cabinet approved the restructuring of the Railway Board, including a reduction in its strength as well as the merger of the different cadres into a central service called the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).**
- **The Board which as of now consists of eight members, including the Chairman, from different service departments such as traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical and signal & telecom will see its strength cut to five members including the Chairman, who will act as a CEO, along with four members responsible for infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance.**

- The ministry is also considering upgrading the 27 General Managers working at zonal levels and various production and specialized units to the secretary-level grade.
- The modalities and unification of the services will be **worked out by the Ministry of Railways in consultation with the DoPT to ensure fairness and transparency.**

Significance:

- **The Railway Board started in 1905**, and over a period of time, has divided the management into several silos. Now, all the 8,400 employees at the management level will come into the Railways through one service — the IRMS.
- **The four services of infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance will now be unified under IRMS.** This move will **break departmentalism and silos** and will set the path of Indian Railways to a **high growth trajectory**. It will create an organisation that **will deliver results speedily**. It will be a **unified and agile organisation** that will take quick decisions. It will work single-mindedly as one, not divided into departments. **This would help ensure the smooth functioning of the Railways and expediting the decision-making process.**
- The Board will also have **some independent members**, who will be highly distinguished professionals. This would bring in the **required knowledge and expertise into the decision-making process.**

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Key steps to kick-starting the economy

Context:

India's economic slowdown.

Details:

- **India's GDP growth rate has been decreasing.** From the level of 8.1% in the fourth quarter of 2017-18, its quarterly GDP growth has fallen to **5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 (six-year low).**
- This steady decline must have had an **adverse impact on employment and poverty reduction in India.**
- One significant factor in the current scenario is the **steep fall in investment rate (gross fixed capital formation rate) from 34.3% in 2011-12 to 27.8% in the second quarter of 2019-20.** This results in a sharp decline in the potential rate of growth by 1.6 percentage points, assuming an **incremental capital-output ratio** of 4.

Structural or cyclical:

- There have been debates on whether this slowdown is structural or cyclical. There is the need to ascertain this because the curative measures to revive the economy would be based on what is causing it.

- If the reasons for the **slowdown is cyclical, then there is an expectation that there is a chance for upturn soon**. If it is purely structural, it will take time until the structural rigidities are removed.

Cyclical:

- Normally, **the slowdown is cyclical if it results from a weakening of demand**. There is plenty of evidence on this as far as the current situation in India is concerned. The composition of growth indicates **that private domestic demand expanded by only 1% in the quarter**.
- Several important sectors such as automobiles, consumer durables and housing do show a slackening of demand. This is also reflected in the **low capacity utilisation of several industries**.

Structural:

- On the structural side, while the reform agenda has been carried forward, there are **segments such as agricultural marketing, land and labour markets which are still waiting for reforms**.
- **One sector which needs immediate reforms is the financial system** — more particularly the banking system and within it the public sector segment. Even as the policymakers address the problem of non-performing assets, attention has to be paid to defining the relationship between **governments and boards of public sector banks** and on their respective roles in management.

Decreasing demand in the economy:

Concerns:

- Available data shows a **weakening of private consumption expenditure**. Addressing the decline in demand is the main remedial action needed.

Channels of Demand:

- The major expenditure categories of national income accounts include **private final consumption expenditure, government final consumption expenditure, gross fixed capital formation (private and public), and exports**.
- Since the efforts to raise demand is dependent on increasing income, therefore, the **three autonomous elements** that can be used as levers to raise demand are **government consumption expenditure, government investment and exports**. Private investment can be treated as autonomous only to a limited extent. However, private foreign investment can be an independent factor which can be leveraged.

Exports:

- Exports can help to stimulate the economy. Exports are influenced by the state of the economy in the rest of the world. Unfortunately, in the current situation, **the rest of the world is also not performing well economically**. However, an effort can still be made to get a better export performance.

Government expenditure:

- The only left viable option is **raising government expenditure**. This is indeed the standard prescription whenever there is deficient demand in the economy.
- In the present context, the emphasis should be to ensure that the **entire increase in government expenditure is diverted towards capital expenditure**.

Monetary policy:

Lack of Monetary Policy transmission:

- Monetary policy has done its role by reducing the Repo rate by 135 percentage points from February 2019 to date.
- **Banks have not followed suit fully due to the high level of non-performing assets.** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) can play a supportive role in expanding liquidity, but there are certain limitations to that.

Limitations of Monetary Policy:

- **The monetary policy generally is more effective in controlling inflation than stimulating an economy.**
- In the present context of the banking situation, the RBI's role is directed more at quickening the resolution process of bad loans and helping banks to move to a healthier situation.

Fiscal policy:

Limitations:

- The countercyclical fiscal policy is also running into problems. **Given the revenue trend, the Central Government may not find it easy to increase its capital expenditures relative to GDP.**

Suggestions:

- Given the **fiscal discipline imposed by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003** on the government, there has been considerable debate on whether the present situation warrants a breach in fiscal deficit norms. **During the international financial crisis of 2008, the fiscal deficit of the Government of India was raised to 6.0% in 2008-09 and it went up to 6.5% in 2009-10.**
- A focused increase in capital expenditures of the Government and the central public sector undertakings (PSUs) may help to apply the brakes on the slowdown. It might also help to **“crowd in” private investment.**
- **Reform of the Goods and Services Tax (GST)** is very much needed. There is a need to take a relook at the commodities falling under various slabs. Perhaps in an effort to get the GST through, a lot more of commodities were pushed under the lower slabs. The GST has to become more manufacturer and trader friendly.

Concerns:

- **The extraordinary increase of fiscal deficit** during 2008 led to the growth rate rising immediately, but it also **landed the Indian economy in problems later on.** However, a modest breach in fiscal deficit may be acceptable.
- There is also the concern that the fiscal deficit indicated by the Budget is always lower than the “true” or “actual” fiscal deficit.

Financial sector:

Concerns:

- The present economic situation, in a sense, **has become more complicated because of the poor health of the financial system.**

- An excessive expansion of credit in the earlier years, combined with the slowdown, has contributed to a rise in non-performing loans in the banking system. Had the banking system been healthy, it could have been used as a lever for stimulating the economy. On the other hand, the banking system, currently, has become a burden.

Suggestions:

- **The quickening of the resolution process along with the recapitalisation of public sector banks has to become the priority.** The cleansing of the financial system which also includes finding solutions to the **problems of non-banking financial companies** will help to push the economy up.
- **Getting financial institutions to a healthy state when they can begin to lend confidently is most crucial for faster growth.**

Conclusion:

- There is a possibility **that 2020 will be better than 2019 for India on the economic front.**
- The **reasonably good monsoon may lead to an improvement in agricultural production and rural demand.**
- Exports can be increased with government effort and if the global trade environment improves.
- Increased government expenditure, particularly in capital expenditures, is one much-needed intervention.
- **Private investment can pick up provided the growth rate begins to look up.**
- Restoring financial institutions — banking and non-banking — to a healthy state when they can begin to lend confidently is the most essential prerequisite for faster growth.

2. Double trouble

Context:

The problem of decreasing economic growth rate and increasing inflation in the Indian economy.

Details:

- **India's GDP growth rate has been decreasing.** From the level of 8.1% in the fourth quarter of 2017-18, its quarterly GDP growth has fallen to **5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 (six-year low).**
- The International Monetary Fund has called for “urgent” policy measures to reverse the current slowdown that has **weighed down global economic growth.**
- The prices in the economy continue to rise. **Food inflation, now in double-digits,** has caused significant pain.
- **Uneven inflation and sluggish growth present serious dilemmas for policymakers.**

Non-uniform Inflation:

Concerns:

- What makes the job of policymakers a lot more complicated is the **non-uniform nature of the current price rise. Perfectly calibrating monetary and fiscal measures** in such a situation amid confusing signals sent out by various inflation numbers can be **a tough ask.**
- In an economy like **India's that has just witnessed a debt-fuelled boom followed by a sharp bust in growth rates,** it is natural to expect the prices of various goods to adjust in accordance with underlying consumer desires to varying degrees.
- Even as **food prices have risen rapidly** — food inflation has crossed the 10% mark for the first time

in many years — **sectors such as manufacturing have witnessed mild deflation as demand for products drops.**

- It should be noted that various prices in the economy generally do not rise or fall in tandem. **Policymakers, however, tend to view the economy as an entity with a general price level that responds in predictable ways to their policy actions. Such an assumption is likely to cause practical difficulties in implementing monetary policy.**

Food inflation:

- **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor, while terming the recent spike in inflation as a transient phenomenon, has called for countercyclical measures and structural reforms to help the economy.**
- **The central bank's hands have been tied down by the recent spike in inflation, and it has halted its rate cut spree that began in February 2019.**
- However, voices continue to grow demanding that the RBI and the government ignore the rise in food inflation and try to infuse more liquidity to boost demand. After all, **the rise in food prices may just be an anomaly amid widespread low inflation in the rest of the economy.**
- The current food price inflation may be the **result of seasonal factors** that have affected crop production. If so, it should certainly be a transient phenomenon that will not trouble policymakers for anything beyond a few quarters.

Way forward:

- The government should concentrate on the **supply-side reforms to both rein in inflation and reverse the economic slowdown.**

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Strengthening grassroots democracy

Context:

Tamil Nadu Government's decision to delay the holding of rural local body elections, due in 2016, by three years.

Background:

- **The unconstitutional delay** in holding local body elections started when the Madras High Court cancelled the notification put forward by the State government citing irregularities in it. The reasons cited for subsequent postponements revolved around delimitation and carving out new districts.
- After resorting to the **infamous ordinance route** to extend the tenure of the Special Officers of local bodies and some back and forth on the means of electing mayors and municipal chairmen, the State will now see elections being held for rural local bodies alone in two phases on December 27 and 30.
- The elections to urban local bodies are expected to be notified soon, which in itself raises questions on the constitutional and moral validity of the time gap between rural and urban local body elections.

Concerns:

- In spite of the fact that it's been more than two decades since **the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament, which accorded constitutional status to local administration bodies across India**, very little progress has been witnessed in truly strengthening the local administrations in India.

- Unconstitutional and immoral methods are being employed to delay the local body elections.
- There are **serious implications of the delay in the conduct of elections** given the significance of local bodies in the domains of efficacy, inclusiveness, participation and strengthening of political party structures.

People's participation:

- Scholars argue that **decentralisation and people's participation** increased in the State of Tamil Nadu since the 1970s, thanks to the socio-political movements in the State.
- The presence of robust machinery at the local level is a measure of the health of democracy and people's participation. Its absence is bound to have an immense effect.

Service delivery:

- Criticisms of bureaucratic hassles and delays apart, the importance of local bodies cannot be discounted, especially in the context of their **role in the public delivery of services** such as the Public Distribution System, pension schemes, and mitigation of disease outbreaks and disasters.

Social justice ramifications:

- In February 2016, a few months before the notification for local body elections was put forward, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the much-needed bill that accorded 50% reservation to women in the local bodies, raising the quota from 33%. This has increased the scope for higher **inclusiveness for women**.
- Reservations are in place for the depressed castes. A delay, therefore, has **social justice ramifications too**, a principle central to the socio-political history of Tamil Nadu.

Strengthening of political party structures:

- **Local body elections serve as a means to both strengthening the political parties' organisational structures** and in enabling them to stay closely connected with the voters.
- Local bodies provide opportunities for the **emergence of leaders at the local level** outside of political parties as well.

Participation of people in political organisations:

- **The numerous opportunities in terms of official posts** that open up through local body elections serve as an opportunity for political parties to give a chance to **party workers from multiple backgrounds to partake in government functioning**.
- Eminent scholars of political science argue that such broad-based accommodation results in '**organisational pluralism**', wherein, with intra-party pluralism, a given party's engagement with society changes its orientation towards **an atmosphere of tolerance**.
- In a diverse society like Tamil Nadu, one can argue that the presence of local bodies serves as a means to usher in **societal syncretism through broad-based representation**.

Conclusion:

- Taking stock of the multifarious benefits stemming out of the existence and functioning of local bodies to all the stakeholders involved, the need for **sterner fixing of accountability and instituting checks in the system to avoid any delays** in the future is of utmost importance.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Return to the homeland

Context:

Criticism of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 for its failure to consider the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka in its provisions.

Details:

- The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 rules out the possibility of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka being granted citizenship under the new law.
- **India has been following the principle of voluntary repatriation in the case of Sri Lankan refugees.**

Background:

The influx of refugees:

- **Tamil Nadu began witnessing an influx of refugees from August 1983 following Black July in Sri Lanka.** The Indian government has maintained that these refugees should go back on their own. In other words, India has been **following the principle of non-refoulement and favouring voluntary repatriation.**
- In October 1983, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi publicly asserted that the country “cannot and will not take millions of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka”. This was in the backdrop of India witnessing the problems posed by the migration of refugees from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) to India in the early 1970s.
- **Despite India’s concerns, India received thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka over the years.** At one point, Tamil Nadu had 2 lakh refugees. Between 1983 and 2013, around 3.04 lakh persons came to the State. At the moment, there are 59,714 refugees living in 107 camps and 34,355 persons outside the camps. Since the end of the civil war in May 2009, nearly 14,000 refugees have returned home.

Nature of repatriation:

- In the early 1990s, especially after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991, a controversy erupted over reports of sections of refugees being sent back “forcibly”.
- Consequently, **the Indian government and the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao agreed to allow representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to screen refugees to ascertain the voluntary nature of the repatriation.** Broadly, there has been no change in this position.
- The UNHCR is also involved in **counselling the refugees, helping them obtain necessary documents, paying for their international travel and providing reintegration grants and post-return support.**
- On its part, the Indian government has been taking steps in its own way to facilitate voluntary repatriation. **While visa fee is waived and overstay penalty is granted to non-camp refugees on a case-to-case basis, camp refugees are given this benefit as a matter of routine.**

The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord:

- There is one more reason why the refugees could not have been included in the scope of the Act. **The**

1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord talks of repatriation.

Need for repatriation:

- New Delhi is **conscious of the adverse demographic impact that the civil war has had on the Tamils of Sri Lanka**. The numerical strength of MPs from Tamil-speaking areas has gone down over the years as Sri Lanka follows proportional representation. If the refugees go back, this will help Tamils get more representatives in the Sri Lankan Parliament.
- The refugees belong to Sri Lanka and they have to go back to Sri Lanka. This would ensure that their right to **return back to their homes** is upheld and would also relieve some burden on India.

Way forward:

- **The 2011 report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission**, set up by the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime in May 2010, not only called for voluntary repatriation but also stressed the need for **creating a conducive environment for the refugees to return** to, and for initiating a formal bilateral consultation process. There is a need to implement this now.
- With the Rajapaksas back in power and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa being receptive to the idea of refugees returning to Sri Lanka, **India should resume negotiations with Sri Lanka to give a push to the process of voluntary repatriation**. But first, Colombo should create conditions that will ensure the **safety and security of the refugees returning to their homeland**.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. New rules, old problems

Context:

Karnataka government's issuance of the notification allowing women to work night shifts in all factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948.

Details:

- In November 2019, the Karnataka government issued **a notification allowing women to work night shifts (7 p.m. to 6 a.m.) in all factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948**.
- States that already allow this are Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
- The amendment suggests that night shifts for women will only be allowed if the **employer ensures adequate safeguards concerning occupational safety and health**, protection of dignity and honour, and transportation from the factory premises to points nearest to the worker's residence. The amendment stipulates **24 points related to occupational rules and regulations**.

Positives:

- In line with **the Night Work Convention, 1990 of the International Labour Organization**, these States **amended the Factories Act to remove both sex-based discrimination in night work and restrictions on the fundamental right to practise any profession**, occupation, trade, or business of one's choice.
- This move has to be read alongside the State's attempt to **improve ease of doing business**, investor friendliness, and flexibility in a macroeconomic climate vis-a-vis **increasing female work participation rate, which is only 25% in India**.
- Welcoming the decision, industrial bodies and chambers of commerce have said it **will benefit the**

trade and manufacturing sectors, especially the garment industry.

Concerns:

- Several concerns have been voiced by women garment workers who are estimated to constitute over 90% of the five lakh garment workers in Karnataka.
- Women garment workers are concerned that while the amendment has stipulated many 'new' guidelines amidst the **plethora of unaddressed concerns**, allowing night shifts would only extend daytime exploitation.

Unaddressed concerns:

- The Garment Labour Union, a women-led trade union argues that if gender equality is a concern, the state ought to **first ensure better working conditions and higher wages in garment factories**.
- Women are being allowed to work night shifts in factories in Karnataka even as their concerns about daytime work persist.

Implementation of occupational rules and regulations:

- The 24 points related to occupational rules and regulations stipulated by the amendment have been in existence for years. Yet, women workers fear that when there is **no safety or dignity in the workplace even during the daytime**, there is very less chance that the employers will be able to ensure all this during night shifts.

Lack of consultations with stakeholders:

- The workers were neither consulted on this matter nor given a circular for their perusal. **Omitting workers and trade unions from discussions about the amendment is also seen by the workers as a short-sighted measure.**
- The new rules recommending monthly meetings with the representatives of the employer seem farcical.

Minimum wages:

- Workers remain pessimistic as they are still not given the promised minimum wage. They are puzzled that the **night shift amendment does not address the issue of pay structure for night work**. Given the very **low bargaining power of the employees**, this can lead to the exploitation of workers.

Harassment:

- Though the amendment places the **onus on employers to prevent sexual harassment**, workers say existing mechanisms aimed at addressing workplace violence, including abuse of workers' rights and verbal abuse, which are primarily driven by unrealistic production targets, are simply absent or dysfunctional.
- Workers also express scepticism about strengthening the **role of inspectors in factories**, as past experience shows **improperly conducted inspections or negligence towards grave violations**. The reality is that workers face the threat of losing their jobs if they report such violations.
- While the amendment has prioritised installation of CCTV cameras, workers point out that there is no guarantee of their operational status or clarity on who handles the footage.

Lack of Women-Oriented policies:

- The amendment has also **failed to address child care**, an important concern in a women-dominated sector, especially when paid care is beyond their means.
- Other promises such as 12 consecutive hours of rest between the last shift and the night shift, separate canteens, and more restrooms also appear unconvincing in a context where even restroom breaks are infrequent due to high production targets.

Systemic failure:

- In a sector where there is systemic failure and worker-management relations are turbulent, putting **the onus of worker safety and security in the hands of the management alone can be risky**.
- It is well-known that **in supply chains, the brands call the shots**. Involving them in discussions on worker dignity and equality is important, which has been neglected in the framing of the current framework.

F. Tidbits

1. Religion no bar for Padmanur's Yakshagana

- Padmanur village, about 30 km away from Mangaluru, will be organising its 60th annual Yakshagana (traditional ritual drama) performance. The members will include people across communities — Hindus, Christians and Muslims.
- A multi-faith committee has organised the traditional performance for 60 years. The funds required for the celebrations are shared by the people irrespective of their religion.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Rohtang tunnel named after Vajpayee

Atal Bhujal Yojana:

- The Cabinet has approved ₹6,000 crores for **the Atal Bhujal Yojana** for five years from 2020-21. **Half of the cost would be borne by the Centre and the rest would be met with a World Bank loan.**
- The scheme is **aimed at improving groundwater management through community participation** in identified **priority areas in seven states**: Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It would be implemented in 8,350 villages across 78 districts. Read more on the [Atal Bhujal Yojana](#) at the linked article.

Rohtang Pass tunnel:

- The tunnel, being **constructed from Manali to Leh**, would be renamed as the 'Atal Tunnel'. The strategic tunnel is 8.8 km long, making it the **longest above the altitude of 3,000 metres in the world**.
- This tunnel will keep the route open even during winter, when the pass may be obstructed due to heavy snowfall.

Tourism projects:

- The Cabinet has approved the release of money for projects sanctioned under **the Swadesh Darshan scheme of the Tourism Ministry**.
- The scheme aims at **developing tourism infrastructure in 15 circuits** — Himalayan, North East,

Krishna, Buddhist, coastal, desert, tribal, eco, wildlife, rural, spiritual, Ramayana, heritage, Tirthankar and Sufi.

- For more on the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, check [PIB dated 24 Dec 2019](#).

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Defence Acquisition Council is headed by the Chief of Defence Staff.
2. The Defence Acquisition Council includes the National security adviser.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- An overarching structure, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), under the Defence Minister was constituted for overall guidance of the defence procurement planning process. The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces in terms of capabilities sought and time frame prescribed by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- The National security adviser is not a member of the DAC. NSA heads the Defence Planning Committee.

Q2. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Atal Bhujal Yojana?

1. It is a centrally sponsored scheme.
2. It is a pan India scheme.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- 'Atal Bhujal Yojana' is a scheme aimed at improving groundwater management through community participation in seven states.
- Atal Bhujal Yojana will help improve groundwater level in 78 districts, more than 8,300 villages in the states of Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka. The scheme will pay special attention to those areas where groundwater is very low.
- The scheme, also known as 'Atal Jal', will promote panchayat-led groundwater management and

behavioural change with a primary focus on demand-side management.

- It is a central sector scheme to be implemented over a period of five years (2020-21 to 2024-25).

Q3. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- a. Hojagiri: Tripura
- b. Yakshagana: Karnataka
- c. Rauf: Jammu and Kashmir
- d. Cheraw: Manipur

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Cheraw dance is a traditional cultural dance performed in Mizoram, India, consisting of mostly six to eight people holding pairs of bamboo staves on another horizontally placed bamboo on the ground.
- The male performers then clap the bamboos rhythmically while groups of female dancers dance in intricate steps between the beating bamboos.

Q4. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution?

1. It prescribes regular elections every five years and election within 9 months of the dissolution of any PRI.
2. To ensure free, fair, and timely elections there is a provision for the setting up of state election commission.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The 73rd Amendment prescribes regular elections every five years and election within six months of the dissolution of any PRI.
- To ensure free, fair, and timely elections there is a provision for the setting up of state election commission.
- The most revolutionary provision is the reservation of one-third of the seats for women in local bodies, along with reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their regional populations.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments according constitutional status to local administration bodies in India, very little progress has been witnessed in truly strengthening the local administrations in India. Comment. Discuss the significance of local bodies in the Indian context. (15 Marks, 250 words)
2. Karnataka government's issuance of the notification allowing women to work night shifts is a

welcome move though there are still some concerns which need to be addressed first for truly empowering the unorganised women workers. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

