

# Dec 1st, 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis

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## A. GS 1 Related

### Category: GEOGRAPHY

#### 1. **Wettest monsoon in 25 years could lift 2020 wheat output**

#### Context:

Above average monsoon rains in India for the year 2019.

#### Details:

- **India is currently the world's second-biggest wheat producer.**

#### Above-average Monsoon:

- India's wheat production could jump to a second consecutive annual record in 2020 as the **wettest monsoon in 25 years** is set to help farmers to **expand the area under the winter-sown crop** while **boosting yields**.
- India grew 102.19 MT of wheat in 2019. The country received monsoon rains during the June-September season that were **10% above average** and the rainfall continued during October and November, **increasing soil moisture levels required for crop sowing**.

#### MSP Hike:

- **Only one wheat crop is grown in India each year, with planting starting in late October and harvesting in March.** Farmers are inclined to expand the area under wheat as its prices are more stable than any other crop due to government buying.
- For 2020, India has lifted the price at which it buys locally produced new-season wheat. After the **hike in Minimum Support Price (MSP)**, wheat planting has become even more attractive for farmers.

#### Concerns:

- Higher production would add to India's already swelling inventories of wheat. Noting that the **MSP coverage is low in India** this can lead to lower market prices for Wheat leading to lower income for farmers.
- **Wheat exports** from India are **difficult because of their comparatively high cost**. Even though India could easily produce more than 100 million tonnes exporting even 1 million tonnes of this will be difficult unless the government provides subsidy for exports.
- The lack of proper warehousing and storage facilities may lead to rotting and **wastage of the wheat grains**.

#### Way forward:

- Need for **Higher govt. procurement** to absorb the increased production and to ensure that the market prices don't fall drastically.
- Need to provide **incentives (subsidy for exports)** for overseas sales to support local prices.

### B. GS 2 Related

#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Will be frank with Delhi to avoid misunderstandings, says Gotabaya

##### Context:

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's state visit to India.

##### Details:

- Promising a more ‘frank and upfront’ relationship with India, the newly elected Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has said that suspicions between the two nations are a thing of the past.
- The Sri Lankan President suggested closer coordination between the two countries and the need to **take India-Sri Lanka ties to a “higher level”, with focus on the priority areas.**

#### China factor:

- The president stressed on the fact that the **Hambantota project** is a purely commercial agreement with China.
- To avoid the misunderstandings of the past between New Delhi and Colombo, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa says India and other countries in the region must invest more in Sri Lanka if they want to provide an alternative to Chinese investment. The Chinese will push the **Belt and Road Initiative** unless other countries provide an alternative.
- The president has stated the need to **renegotiate the Hambantota port agreement** with China, which India was concerned about.
- Sri Lanka suggested closer coordination between the two countries and assured India that on the “**main issues**” of **Sri Lankan ties with China and Pakistan**, there would be no problem “that creates suspicions amongst Indian authorities”.

#### Development cooperation:

- The president stressed the need to build a consistent relationship with India with respect to developmental co-operation.
- **India announced an additional \$400 million for development projects in Sri Lanka.**
- On the issue of the April 2017 MoU signed by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on **port and oil farm projects in Trincomalee** with India, the president has stated that each project would be considered separately regarding the viability and its usefulness to Sri Lanka while maintaining that Sri Lanka must have control of strategically important projects.
- India has also shown interest in being a part of the **Mattala airport.**

#### Cooperation on terrorism:

- Mr Gotabaya hoped for more **cooperation with India on national security issues**, particularly on the threat from the Islamic State that was behind the Easter Sunday attacks.
- The security threat in Sri Lanka has now changed. IS [the Islamic State] is a global threat posed by terrorists across the world. India can help Sri Lanka with **intelligence and technological cooperation.**

#### Tamil issue:

- On the issue of rights for **Tamil-majority areas in the North and the East**, Mr Gotabaya said he intends to focus on the **development of the region.**
- In the backdrop of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’s visit to Colombo and the subsequent statement urging justice and equality for Tamils, the president felt that full devolution of powers as promised by the **13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1987** could not be implemented against the wishes and feeling of the majority [Sinhala] community.

**Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. NE to be shielded from citizenship law impact**

### Context:

A consultative process on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), which is expected to be introduced in the ongoing Parliament session.

### Background:

- **Indian Citizenship Amendment Bill** was proposed in the Lok Sabha in 2016, amending the **Citizenship Act of 1955**. This Bill proposes that refugees from **minority communities like Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikhs, Parsi or Christian coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will be eligible for Indian citizenship**. The Bill **relaxes the requirement of residence in India from 11 years to 6 years for these migrants**. The move has been justified stating protection of minority refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB) passed earlier by the Lok Sabha had lapsed as it could not be passed in the Upper House.
- The northeastern states have opposed the Bill amid concerns that outsiders would settle there, and that their unique tradition and culture would be compromised due to demographic transition in the region.
- It is feared that the new bill would nullify the provisions of **the Assam Accord of 1985**, which fixed March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for deportation of illegal migrants, irrespective of religion. There has been strong resistance to the CAB in Assam as it would pave the way for giving citizenship, mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh in Assam who settled post-March 1971, the cut-off date for inclusion in Assam's NRC as per the 1985 Assam Accord.
- As per Article 6 of the Constitution the cut-off date for migration to India from Pakistan is July 19, 1948, whereas, in Assam, that borders Bangladesh, it is March 24, 1971.

### Details:

- Civil society groups and political representatives from the Northeastern region met the Home-minister in Delhi as part of a consultative process on the CAB, which is expected to be introduced in the ongoing Parliament session.
- The meeting with representatives and groups was held in the backdrop of protests against the Bill in the Northeastern States.
- Majority of the delegations were against the CAB in its present form and that Home minister has assured them that the concerns of all groups would be accommodated without compromising the soul of the Bill.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah has assured civil society and political representatives from the northeastern States that tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, and States protected by the **Inner Line Permit (ILP) system — Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland** — would be shielded from the impact of the proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2019.
- The exemption will mean that undocumented non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, who acquire Indian citizenship under the new law, will not be allowed to settle in these areas and States, but can do so in other parts of the country. **New citizens will not be allowed to settle in the region.**
- The people who acquire citizenship as per this Bill will require Inner Line Permit (ILP) in states which have the ILP system in place. They can have Indian citizenship, but cannot settle in these States (Northeast); they will still require the consent of the State government. **Citizens from other States require ILP to visit Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland as per Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.**
- In Tripura and Assam, a large number of people are likely to claim citizenship under the new Bill. A mechanism to provide protection to the indigenous communities of these two States and also Manipur would be examined.
- The fresh version being drafted for introduction in Parliament would mention December 31, 2014, as the cut-off date.

- The CAB would have a provision to detect and deport all illegal migrants who entered after December 2014.
- With respect to Assam, in particular, the Centre has appointed a committee for implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord which provides for constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. It recommends reserving Assembly seats for indigenous communities of Assam.

## Category: HEALTH

### 1. Antibiotic prescription rate high in private sector

#### Context:

A new study by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) on Antibiotic prescription rates in India.

#### Details:

- The study is the first-ever estimate of outpatient antibiotic prescription rates and patterns in the private sector.
- The report states that **India is one of the top users of antibiotics.**
- The **private sector clocked high levels of antibiotic prescription rates** (412 per 1,000 persons per year), according to the report.
- The highest rate was seen among children aged 0–4 years (636 per 1,000 persons) and the lowest in the age group 10–19 years (280 per 1,000 persons).
- The authors used the 12-month period (May 2013–April 2014) medical audit data set and concluded that the **prescription rates for certain classes are on a higher side in India as compared to the developed nations.**
- The study said the percentage of prescriptions for wide-spectrum antibiotics like cephalosporins and quinolones (38.2% and 16.3%) was significantly higher than the U.S. (14.0% and 12.7%) and Greece (32.9% and 0.5%).
- **Unusually high prescription rates** of beta-lactams-penicillins and cephalosporins in uncomplicated upper respiratory infections in children are in stark contrast to the prescription rates and pattern reported in Europe.
- The study noted that the **per-capita antibiotic consumption in the retail sector has increased by around 22% in five years from 2012 to 2016.**

#### Concerns:

- Though **clinical guidelines on judicious antibiotic use** explicitly mention that they should not be prescribed for the common cold, non-specific upper respiratory tract infection (URI), acute cough illness and acute bronchitis, **the study shows a high rate of prescriptions for respiratory infections in primary care.**
- The study highlighted that of the 519 million antibiotic prescriptions, **the majority were dispensed for the diseases of the respiratory system (55%),** followed by genitourinary system (10%) and symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical findings (9%); **generally these infections are viral in origin and self-limiting in nature.**
- **Irrational prescription and use of antibiotics** have its origins in production and selling tactics of pharma companies.
- The **misuse of antibiotics and easy access fuels antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which is a growing concern worldwide and in India.**



## Way forward:

There is a need to **target antimicrobial stewardship programmes to specific constituencies and stakeholders to raise awareness on antibiotics and prevent its misuse.**

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. 'Report on forests soon'

##### Context:

Update of the India State of Forest Report (ISFR).

##### Details:

- The Environment Ministry is likely to release an update on the state of forests in India in December 2019 and this exercise is to ascertain whether there has been an increase or decrease in forest cover.
- **The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) is a biennial exercise** to estimate the forest cover, the density of forest vegetation, tree cover across States, and the progress of plantation outside regions officially designated 'forest.'
- The **exercise involves both satellite mapping and surveys** to map increase or decrease in forest cover.
- The latest ISFR, or the report of 2017, was released in February 2018, after a delay of nearly three months.

### Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### 1. PSLV gearing up for its 50th flight

##### Context:

The 50th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

##### Details:

- The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is preparing for the 50th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), **popularly called the agency's workhorse.** The lift-off of the PSLV-C48 mission is scheduled for December 2019.
- To date, 49 PSLV missions have lifted off from **the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.** They include the initial three developmental flights and 46 operational flights. The total count includes two failed missions and the PSLV variants, such as PSLV-XL and PSLV-CA.
- **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC),** is ISRO's lead agency for launch vehicles.
- Along with the **higher capacity Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV),** the PSLV continues to remain the mainstay of the Indian space programme.

- In a ‘career’ spanning nearly three decades, the **PSLV has launched more than 45 Indian payloads — including the Chandrayaan 1 and Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan) spacecraft and the IRNSS satellites** — and 310 foreign satellites. The C37 mission has the distinction of placing 104 satellites in orbit, a record.
- The 50th flight would have 10 satellites on board, including India’s RISAT-2BR1 and nine small satellites from abroad.
- The successor to the SLV and the ASLV, **PSLV is the ISRO’s third-gen launch vehicle**, capable of **placing payloads in different orbits, including the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)**.

**Category: ECONOMY**

## **1. 12 global firms interested to shift base from China to India: FM**

**Context:**

Government policies to boost the economy.

**Background:**

- In the biggest reduction in 28 years, the government, in September 2019, **reduced the corporate tax rate by almost 10 percentage points, in a bid to give a boost to the sagging economy.**
- Base corporate tax for existing companies has been reduced to 22% from 30%, and **for new manufacturing firms incorporated after October 1, 2019, and starting operations before March 31, 2023, it was slashed to 15% from 25%.**
- In the backdrop of the **US-China trade war**, some companies are considering moving out of China now that the trade war is eating into the profitability of firms operating out of China.

**Details:**

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has stated that about 12 global companies had evinced interest to shift their base from China to India, taking advantage of the competitive tax rate of 15% announced recently.
- The Ministry has said the effort taken towards bringing newer industries, which were moving out of China, was actively moving forward. The government is likely to propose concrete offers for the companies to shift so that the ecosystems can get built in India and new industries can come.

**Infrastructural push:**

- The Finance Ministry, in September 2019, set up a **task force** headed by the Economic Affairs Secretary to prepare a **road map for the ‘national infrastructure pipeline’ from 2019-20 to 2024-25 under a ₹100-lakh crore infra plan.**
- With regard to investment of ₹100 lakh crore in the next five years, the task force would come out with a list of 10 major infrastructure projects by December and investment in these projects would be front-loaded.

**D. GS 4 Related**

*Nothing here for today!!!*

Category:POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### 1. Fractured verdicts and the Governor's role

**Context:**

Political crisis in Maharashtra.

**Background:**

- A prolonged stalemate was witnessed in Maharashtra over the formation of a government as no single party had a majority of its own resulting in a hung assembly after the Assembly election in October.
- A **pre-poll alliance** of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena had a clear majority, but the Sena broke the alliance over unresolved issues related to the sharing of power.
- Even as a **post-poll combination** was being worked out, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's controversial decision to administer the oath to Devendra Fadnavis of the Bharatiya Janata Party as Chief Minister and Ajit Pawar of the NCP as Deputy Chief Minister was taken to court by the Shiv Sena, the NCP, and the Congress.
- After the Supreme Court of India ordered an early floor test, Ajit Pawar resigned. Mr. Fadnavis followed suit, admitting that he did not have the required majority.
- A new post-poll combination, between the Sena, NCP and the Congress and some independents, has now formed the government.
- The developments have brought focus on the **role of the Governor** in such circumstances.

**Governor's role in case of a hung Assembly:**

- The Constitution envisages that the **Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers**, except in those situations in which he is, by or under the Constitution, required to act in his **discretion (Article 163)**.
- It is clear that in identifying a candidate who, in his opinion, is in a position to command a majority, the Governor has to make his own decision, subject, of course, to democratic norms. This is why one often sees the Governor of a State inviting leaders for discussions as part of efforts to explore the possibility of forming a government.
- When the Governor appoints the Chief Minister in this way, it is accompanied by a stipulation that the **appointee proves his or her majority within a specified time on the floor of the House**.

**Preferred order for the process of appointing CM:**

- The Governor may invite the leader of the largest single party first. However, if it is clear that the largest single party has no potential ally or enough independent members to ensure a majority, he may also invite the leader of the largest pre-poll combination or alliance.
- If there is no combination or alliance, he may invite leaders one by one in the order of their size in the new Assembly. During this process, a post-poll combination may emerge, if anyone of them agrees to form a government. The Governor may insist on letters of support from those outside the leader's party who are willing to join or extend support to him.



## How does the Governor ascertain the majority?

- In the past, there were instances of party leaders parading legislators supposedly supporting them in Raj Bhavan, and Governors doing a headcount or verifying signatures.
- This approach has been deprecated by courts, and there is a consensus now that **the floor of the Assembly is the only place where the majority is to be decided.**
- Normally, **under Article 174, the Governor summons the House only on the advice of the Council of Ministers** but will be within his constitutional rights to cause the House to be convened if there is a reason to believe that there is a doubt about the incumbent's majority.
- **The Governor may advise the Chief Minister to summon the Assembly, if it is not in session, to demonstrate his support.**

## Guidance to the Governor:

### The Sarkaria Commission recommendations:

- The **Sarkaria Commission on inter-State relations** dealt with this issue.
- The Commission's report **suggests the following orders for Governors to follow:** 1. An alliance formed prior to the election; 2. The largest single party staking claim with the support of others, including independents; 3. A post-electoral coalition, with all partners joining the government; 4. A post-poll coalition, with some joining the government, and others extending support from outside.
- As general principles, the Sarkaria Commission says the Governor should look for a party or combination that commands the widest support in the Assembly, and that "his task is to see that a government is formed, and not to try to form a government which will pursue policies which he approves".
- The Sarkaria Commission recommends that **a person, who has been appointed Chief Minister without a clear majority, should seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly within 30 days.** "This practice should be strictly adhered to with the sanctity of a rule of law," it says.
- Similarly, when the majority of the Chief Minister is contested by a significant number of legislators, the Governor should not risk a determination of his own outside the House, and it would be prudent **"to cause the rival claims to be tested on the floor of the House"**.

### Principles evolved by the Supreme Court:

- Some seminal judgments of the Supreme Court have dealt with these issues.
- The key principle that ought to guide the Governor is set out in the **R. Bommai vs. Union of India case (1994)**. The proper course, the court said, for **testing the strength of a ministry is a floor test which alone is the constitutionally ordained forum.** Even though this verdict was in the context of the imposition of President's rule in different States, the principle holds good for any situation in which Governors have to decide on the appointment of a Chief Minister or continuance of a regime based on its numerical strength in the House.
- In **Rameshwar Prasad (2005), the court ruled that there was nothing wrong with installing a post-poll combination** and that the Governor could not decline the formation of a government on the ground that it was being done through unethical means.
- In **February 1998**, in an unusual and trend-setting order (**Jagdambika Pal vs. Union of India and Ors**), the Supreme Court ordered a **'composite floor test' involving two rival claimants** — Kalyan Singh and Jagdambika Pal. A significant aspect of the court's order was that it was made clear that the floor test would be the only item on the agenda of the House.
- A similar order was passed in March 2005 in the Jharkhand Assembly. More recently, in 2016, Harish Rawat won a floor test ordered by the Supreme Court in Uttarakhand. In 2017, a similar order was passed in respect of the Goa Assembly.
- Karnataka (2018) and Maharashtra (2019) are instances of the court ordering a floor test in a situation in which the Assembly had not yet been convened after the general election. Therefore, the legislators

were yet to take their oaths. The court directed the appointment of a pro tem Speaker, to be followed by the administration of oath to the new members and, thereafter, a floor test.

- In a case examining the validity of the Governor advancing a session of the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly on his own, a Constitution Bench cautioned Governors against acting on internal party developments or “entering the political thicket”.

#### Way forward:

- The court has so far justified its intervention by way of ordering floor tests, reasoning that such orders were necessary to preserve constitutional and democratic values.
- In its recent order in the Maharashtra case, the court observed: “In a situation wherein, if the floor test is delayed, there is a **possibility of horse-trading**, it becomes incumbent upon the court to act to protect democratic values.”
- Such cases raise the issue of “**boundaries between the court’s jurisdiction and parliamentary independence**”. There is a need for a **clear demarcation of jurisdiction** between the two.
- The acts of Governors in seeking letters of support, requiring Chief Ministers to prove their majority, and entertaining letters of withdrawal of support have so far been based on convention. Whether such acts are justifiable may require adjudication. In the latest case too, the question of whether the Maharashtra Governor’s decision to invite one claimant, rather than another, based on an unsubstantiated letter of support is correct, is open to adjudication. This needs to be dealt with in a comprehensive manner.
- **A set of written instructions or guidelines for Governors to act in such situations needs to be prepared at the earliest.**

For more information on this issue: [Click here](#)

## 2. Why are there objections to the Transgender Persons Bill?

### Context:

The passing of the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019**.

### Background:

- In **2013**, the government set up **an expert committee** to study the problems of transgenders and recommend solutions. The committee, comprising experts from various fields and members of the community, also looked at **past experience as in the State of Tamil Nadu, which had set up a welfare board for transgender persons**, and made recommendations right from allowing a ‘third gender’ in official forms, to setting up of special toilets, and **customising health interventions**.
- **In 2014, a private member Bill, The Rights of Transgendered Persons, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by Tiruchi Siva, a Member of Parliament from Tamil Nadu**, which looked at a range of **entitlements** of such persons, providing specifically for them in health, education sectors, skill development and employment opportunities, and protection from abuse and torture. It was passed in the Rajya Sabha.
- **In 2016, the Government introduced its own Bill in the Lok Sabha and it was referred to a Standing Committee**, which made a number of recommendations including defining the term persons with intersex variations, granting reservations for socially and educationally backward classes, and recognition of civil rights including marriage, partnership, divorce, and adoption. However, **with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19), that Bill lapsed**.
- Recently **Parliament has made into law the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019, which had been framed for the welfare of transgender persons.**

- The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha in August 2019, a month after its introduction in the House, and the Rajya Sabha cleared it in November 2019.
- The Bill was meant to be a consequence of the directions of the Supreme Court of India in the **National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India case judgment**, mandating the Central and State governments to ensure legal recognition of all transgender persons and proactive measures instituted for their welfare.
- Activists referring to the above judgment have been chastising the Union government for failing to live up to the opportunity to ensure that **fundamental rights are guaranteed to all people regardless of their sex characteristics or gender identity**.
- The community had organized protests across the country, urging changes to the Bill, claiming that in the form in which the Central government had conceived it, it showed a **poor understanding of gender and sexual identity**.

### **Objections to the Bill:**

#### Name of the Bill:

- Activists had problems with the name. **‘Transgender’ was restrictive**, they argued, and it showed a lack of understanding of the complexities in people who **do not conform to the gender binary, male/female**.
- Rejecting ‘Transgender’ as the nomenclature, the activists have suggested instead that the title should be a comprehensive “Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (Protection of Rights) Bill”, and in definition, have sought to introduce the **distinction between transgender and intersex person** Members of the community perceive transgender as different from intersex and were insistent that the distinction is made in the Bill.
- Transgenders have a different gender identity than what was assigned to them at birth, while intersex indicates the diversity of gender-based on biological characteristics — ambiguity in anatomical genitalia — at birth. There are also multiple variations in intersex itself.

#### Identity issue:

- While the Act is progressive in that it **allows self-perception of identity**, it **mandates a certificate from a district magistrate declaring the holder to be transgender**. This goes **against the principle of self-determination** itself, activists argue, also pointing out that there is no room for redress in case an appeal for such a certificate is rejected.

#### National Council for Transgender Persons:

- While the Act envisages the setting up of a **National Council for Transgender Persons** to provide the **institutional framework** for its implementation, suggestions on the composition of such a council, or the demand to set up a working group for a Council for Intersex Persons were also ignored.

#### Ignoring special needs:

- Transgender and intersex persons might require a range of **unique health care needs**, and that should have been incorporated into the Act, activists say.

#### Sex Reassignment surgery:

- One long-pending demand has been to declare **forced, unnecessary and non-consensual sex reassignment surgery illegal**, and to enforce punitive action for violations. There is no mention of this in the bill.

- In early 2019, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court declared a ban on sex normalization surgeries on intersex children and infants, relying on a petition to the National Human Rights Commission on the subject from Gopi Shankar, an intersex person, and activist. The Tamil Nadu government followed this up with issuing a Government Order banning such surgeries.

#### Implementational challenges:

- While the community is miffed that the Bill has become an Act without any effort to make valid or relevant changes to its original composition, it **worries about how implementation will address the pressing needs of the community.**

#### **Way forward:**

- The National Council for Transgender Persons must allow for a more favourable implementation of the law, and thus provide more elbow room for genuine representations of the community and the appeals and the concerns of the community.

**For more information on this issue:** [Click here](#)

**Category:**ECONOMY

### **1. e-Toll for the road**

#### **Context:**

Making FASTag mandatory for all vehicles on national highways.

#### **Details:**

- From December 15, 2019, **FASTag, a prepaid rechargeable tag for toll payments, on national highways will become mandatory for all vehicles.**
- The **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** extended the earlier deadline of December 1.

#### **Study on the cost of delay on Indian roads:**

- A **joint study in 2014-15 by the Transport Corporation of India and the Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta** estimated the **cost of delay on Indian roads** at \$6.6 billion per year. The cost of additional fuel consumption due to delays was also put at \$14.7 billion per year.
- The study notes that the average cost of delay, including the shipper's expenses, was ₹151.38 an hour. The figure may seem insignificant if seen at the individual level. However, the effect of delay on the economy is not insignificant. As per the Road Transport Year Book 2011-12, available on the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways website, there were about 7.6 million goods vehicles as on March 31, 2012, increasing at 8-9% per annum in the last couple of years. If we consider a conservative 8% growth, **the number of goods vehicles as on March 31, 2015, is estimated at about 9.6 million, which means that the annual cost of delay to the Indian economy could be a whopping ₹432 billion or \$6.6 billion.**
- The study noted that if **mileage can be improved by increasing fuel efficiency, improving road conditions and reducing stoppage delays, the impact on the economy could be huge.**
- The report had suggested that to expedite the toll collection process, India should gradually **move towards electronic toll collection, which would not only reduce congestion and queues at toll plazas but also reduce operating costs for toll operators and plug revenue leakages.**



## FASTag:

- It is a **prepaid radio-frequency identification-enabled tag that facilitates the automatic deduction of toll charges.**
- The new system will now do away with a stop-over of vehicles and cash transactions at toll plazas.
- Projected as **the ‘Aadhaar’ card for vehicles**, the FASTag electronic toll collection program is being **implemented by the Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL), a company incorporated by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)**, and the National Payments Corporation of India in coordination with Toll Plaza Concessionaires, tag issuing agencies and banks.
- Currently, FASTag can be bought from 22 certified banks, through various online platforms, online applications and at select points-of-sale locations.
- The tag, which can be recharged through cheque or online payments, is fixed on the windshield of a vehicle, ideally on the glass just behind the rear-view mirror. It is scanned by the tag reader and the toll amount is deducted when the vehicle approaches a toll plaza. The user gets a short message service (SMS) alert on the registered mobile phone about all transactions and the available balance.
- Service providers have developed a **‘My FASTag’ mobile application** to provide a one-stop solution to users. An NHAI prepaid wallet has also been launched, giving users the option of not linking the tags to their bank accounts.
- FASTag has a validity of five years. Over 70 lakh FASTags had been issued till November 27. The tag is currently accepted at more than 500 National Highways and about 40 State highway toll plazas.

## Benefits:

- The FASTag toll collection programme will help **remove bottlenecks, ensure seamless movement of traffic and save time.**
- By **reducing delays** it will plug revenue leakages and **reduce the cost of delays and fuel consumption**, which is also likely to cut down the nation’s GDP loss.
- The **centralized system provides authentic and real-time data to government agencies for better analysis and policy formulation.**
- It also helps reduce air pollution and the use of paper **thus reducing the carbon footprint of India**, besides cutting the cost of managing toll plazas.

## Future applications:

### Integration with the e-way Bill system:

- On October 14, 2019, the IHMCL and GST Network signed a memorandum of understanding for **integrating FASTag with the e-way bill system.**
- The arrangement has been made for a **more efficient ‘track-and-trace’ mechanism** involving goods vehicles. It will also check revenue leakage at toll plazas.
- The integration, which will become mandatory across the country from April 2020, will **help revenue authorities check whether goods vehicles are actually headed to the specified destination.**
- Suppliers and transporters will also be able to keep track of their vehicles through SMS alerts generated at each tag reader-enabled toll plaza.

### Additional uses:

- The Central government also plans to enable the use of FASTag for a range of other facilities **such as fuel payments and parking charges.** Several States have already signed memoranda of understanding to join the system.

For more information on this issue: [Click here](#)



## F. Tidbits

### 1. Recent SC verdicts rein in constitutional authorities

- The Supreme Court, through its back-to-back decisions in November 2019 while resolving the political crises in Maharashtra and Karnataka, has sent a strong message to high **constitutional authorities who shed their neutrality** to favour party politics in States.
- The court has highlighted the need for **authorities like the Speaker and the Governor to be faithful to constitutional morality** and not vacillate under “prevailing political pressures”.
- The court has made it clear that as “the sentinel on the qui vive of the Constitution, it is under obligation to see that the democracy prevails and not gets hollowed by individuals”.

### 2. Combination therapy using malaria drug quickly clears TB

- Researchers have made an important discovery of the mechanism used by **TB bacteria to tolerate TB drugs**, which necessitates longer treatment of six-nine months. They have also demonstrated that a **drug combination** using malaria drug prevents the bacteria from inducing this mechanism thus leading to a **shorter treatment regimen to treat drug-sensitive TB**.

### 3. Eating up CO<sub>2</sub>

- Scientists have engineered a **strain of E. coli bacteria to eat carbon dioxide** and grow rather than eating sugars and other organic matter. This is a breakthrough and can be used to make several organic molecules in the lab which **can be used as biofuels or food**.

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. ‘Work on to fix cross-border insolvency’

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India Chairman M.S. Sahoo has said that work is on to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 that will address cross-border insolvency.
- **The IBC in its present form does not address the aspect of cross-border insolvency.**
- The government is keen to introduce a globally accepted and well-recognised cross-border insolvency framework, which will make India an attractive investment destination, given the increased predictability and certainty of the insolvency process.

### 2. GST funds: non-BJP ruled States to call on Nirmala

- Few states have demanded the release of **The Goods and Services Tax compensation** due to the states from the Centre, following the Central government's delay in releasing GST compensation.
- The states have raised the opinion that the Centre should raise the cess, if needed, to compensate the States and continue to **compensate the States for the funds' shortfall incurred on introducing GST**.
- The **GST Council has a dispute redressal mechanism** for any disputes among the members of the council.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

**Q1. Consider the following statements wrt Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:**

1. It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
2. As per the provisions of the law the government of India formed the Animal Welfare Board of India.
3. The act makes a provision under "Saving as respects manner of killing prescribed by religion" that nothing contained in the Act shall render it an offence to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community.

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

- a. 1 and 2
- b. 2 and 3
- c. 1, 2 and 3
- d. 1 and 3

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted in 1960 to prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals and to amend the laws relating to the prevention of cruelty to animals. As per the provisions of the law the government of India formed the Animal Welfare Board of India.

Post the removal of Article 370 the given act is applicable even to Jammu and Kashmir.

The act however makes a provision under "Saving as respects manner of killing prescribed by religion": Nothing contained in this Act shall render it an offence to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community.

**Q2. Which of the following statement regarding Chile is wrong?**

- a. Chile lies between the Andes to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east.
- b. Chile borders Peru to the north, Bolivia to the northeast.
- c. The arid Atacama Desert lies in northern Chile contains great mineral wealth, principally copper and lithium.
- d. Chile is located along a highly seismic and volcanic zone, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire.

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

Chile lies between the Andes to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Chile borders Peru to the north, Bolivia to the northeast and Argentina to the east. Chile is located along a highly seismic and volcanic zone, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, due to the subduction of the Nazca and Antarctic plates in the South American plate.

**Q3. Consider the following statements regarding SPARSH (Social Innovation programme for Products: Affordable & Relevant to Societal Health):**

1. The programme is initiated by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) under the aegis of Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India.
2. The scheme intends to create a pool of social innovators in the biotech arena who will identify the specific needs and gaps in healthcare.
3. The social innovators will be provided financial and technical support for developing market-based solutions that have potential to bring cost effective health care breakthroughs to vulnerable populations in particular.

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

- a. 1 and 2
- b. 2 and 3
- c. 1, 2 and 3
- d. 1 and 3

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

**SPARSH objectives:**

- Identify and provide support to cutting edge innovations towards affordable product development that can bring significant social impact and address challenges of inclusive growth.
- Provide support in form of impact funding of biotech product innovations (with social goals) that can be scaled.
- Create and foster a pool of social innovators in the field of biotech and provide a platform to share the best practices, understand intricacies of business models in social innovation and network.

**Q4. Which of the following statements are wrong?**

1. An avalanche (also called a snowslide) is an event that occurs when a cohesive slab of snow lying upon a weaker layer of snow fractures and slides down a steep slope.
2. Presently there are no methods to mitigate or prevent avalanches.

**Options:**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

Preventive measures are employed in areas where avalanches pose a significant threat to people, such as ski resorts, mountain towns, roads, and railways. There are several ways to prevent avalanches and lessen their power and develop preventative measures to reduce the likelihood and size of avalanches by disrupting the structure of the snowpack, while passive measures reinforce and stabilize the snowpack in situ. The simplest active measure is repeatedly traveling on a snowpack as snow accumulates; this can be by means of boot-packing, ski-cutting, or machine grooming. Explosives are used extensively to prevent avalanches, by triggering smaller avalanches that break down instabilities in the snowpack, and removing overburden that can result in larger avalanches.

Passive preventive systems such as snow fences and light walls can be used to direct the placement of snow. Snow builds up around the fence, especially the side that faces the prevailing winds.

To mitigate the effect of avalanches the construction of artificial barriers can be very effective in reducing avalanche damage.

### I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the backdrop of the recent political crisis in Maharashtra discuss the recommendations from the Sarkaria commission and the important Supreme Court Judgments which can act as a guide to the Governor in case of a hung assembly. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. The recent move of The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to make FASTag mandatory for all vehicles on the national highways is a welcome move. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

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