**Polity and Governance**

**TRIFED's Initiatives For Tribal Population**

**Syllabus:** GS2/ Government Policies and Interventions

**In News:**
Recently, Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) launched several initiatives for sustainable livelihoods for the tribal population.

- These initiatives were launched in hybrid mode i.e. physically as well as virtually.

**Objectives and Need of the Initiatives**

- The goal of TRIFED is to connect the entire tribal community of the country with the employment-oriented program.
- The livelihood of tribals is basically based on forest resources. Because they are nature worshipers and live according to nature.
- They have a good knowledge of the herbs found in the forest.
- The medical value of these forests is well known. Apart from this, tribals have very good craftsmanship.
- But the products of the tribals do not fetch a good price at the local level, even though they will be valued highly in national and international markets.
- Now with the help of new initiatives TRIFED, a good platform will be available to the tribals to sell their products, which will increase their income and improve their standard of living.

**Major Initiatives**

- **Sankalp Se Siddhi – Mission Van Dhan**
  - TRIFED plans to expand its operations through convergence of various schemes of different Ministries and Departments and launch the various tribal
development programs in **Mission Mode under “Sankalp Se Siddhi – Mission Van Dhan”**.
- Through this mission, establishment of 50,000 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, 3000 Haat Bazaars, 600 Godowns, 200 Mini TRIFOOD Units, 100 Common Facility Centres, 100 TRIFOOD parks, 100 SFURTI clusters, 200 Tribes India retail stores, ecommerce platforms for TRIFOOD and Tribes India brands is being targeted.
- Implementation of this crucial mission will definitely result in the transformation of the tribal ecosystem in our country.

**• Tribes India Outlets**
- Seven new Tribes India Outlets inaugurated at Jagdalpur, Ranchi, Jamshedpur and Sarnath Immunity boosting hampers,
  - It will showcase tribal products from all over the country and the outlets will have **specific geographical indication (GI) and Vandhan corners** and will display the large variety of GI tagged and natural products from different parts of the country.
  - The Sarnath outlet is the **first successful collaboration** with the Ministry of Culture at an ASI heritage site.
  - With these outlets, the total number of Tribes India outlets have gone up to 141.

**• New TRIFED Head Office**
- The new TRIFED Office premises at NSIC Complex in New Delhi is around 30,000 sq ft in area and has state-of-the-art infrastructure.
- It houses office space for the Minister for Tribal Affairs, Managing Director, senior officials and all staff.

**• Van Dhan Software Application**
- It is designed to **receive and process** the Van Dhan proposals online.
- The software application has geographic information system (GIS) integration and can monitor Van Dhan Project implementation activities and can generate related reports.

**• A Digital Connect programme** under which a two way communication process is proposed to be established.

**• A Tribes India Coffee Table Book** - It showcases the rich cultural tribal heritage and highlights the journey of various tribal artisans practicing different arts and crafts.
- It also showcases the impacts of TRIFED initiatives.

**• Workshops**
- TRIFED has also been providing Skill upgradation & Design Development Workshops for the development of Tribal Artisans through Handicraft and Income Generation Training Programs.
Other Related initiatives

- TRIFED has been implementing several noteworthy programmes for the empowerment of the tribals.
- Over the past two years, The ‘Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP’ has impacted the tribal ecosystem in a major way.
- The Van Dhan tribal start-ups have emerged as a source of employment generation for tribal gatherers and forest dwellers and the home-bound tribal artisans.
- During the pandemic, efforts were made for skill development of the tribal artisans and 17 training Programs were approved for benefitting 340 tribal artisans and developing 170 new designed products.
- **Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)**
  - It is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED and was launched on 14th April 2018.
  - The scheme seeks to **improve tribal incomes through value addition of tribal products**.
  - Under this, Van Dhan Vikas Kendra is established for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.
  - One typical VDVK comprises 15 Self Help Groups, each consisting of 20 Tribal gatherers.
    - The Van Dhan Kendras have been kept functional even during the pandemic and have ensured livelihoods to the tribal people in the difficult times.
- **Tech for Tribal” programme**
  - It was launched by TRIFED and IIT-Kanpur along with IIT-Roorkee, IIM Indore, Kalinga Institute of Social Science, Bhubaneshwar and SRIJAN, Jaipur in the first phase of organising tribal entrepreneurship and skill development program.
  - It is supported by the Ministry of MSME.
  - It aims to **transform 5 crore Tribal Entrepreneurs** and aims at capacity building and imparting entrepreneurship skills to tribal forest produce gatherers enrolled under the **Pradhan Mantri VanDhan Yojana (PMVDY)**.
  - The Programme will develop entrepreneurship skills among the tribals.

**TRIFED**
- TRIFED stands for The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India. It was established in 1987. It has its headquarters located in New Delhi with a network of 13 Regional Offices.
- It is a **national-level apex organization** functioning under the administrative control of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. It acts as a facilitator and service provider for tribes.
It aims to empower tribal people with knowledge, tools and pool of information so that they can undertake their operations in a more systematic and scientific manner. Its objective is socio-economic development of tribal people in the country by way of marketing development of the tribal products such as metal craft, tribal textiles, pottery, tribal paintings and pottery on which the tribals depend heavily for a major portion of their income. It also involves capacity building of the tribal people through sensitization, the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and imparting training to them for undertaking a particular activity.

Who are Tribals?

- Tribals are known to be the autochthonous people of the land. Tribals are often referred to as ‘adivasi’, ‘vanvasi’, ‘pahari’, ‘adimjati’, ‘anusuchit janjati’, etc.
- India has the second-largest tribal population in the world, the first being Africa and tribal Communities are the integral segment of Indian society.
- The Government of India has initiated a number of steps to develop socio-economic conditions of tribal population in the country and one of those initiatives is the formation of Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) in 1987.

Source: PIB

Polity and Governance

‘One Nation One Ration Card’ Scheme

Syllabus: GS2/ Welfare Schemes

In News

Recently, the Supreme court observed that all states must implement the ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ scheme.

- The Supreme court had asked the government to detail its schemes to provide food to migrant workers hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

About the Scheme

- It was rolled out by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution in 2019 in 4 states on a pilot basis.
- **Aim:** To ensure hassle-free delivery of subsidized food grains to all migratory beneficiaries anywhere in the country through nation-wide portability under National Food Security Act (NFSA).
○ To empower all National Food Security Act migrant beneficiaries to access foodgrains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) of their choice anywhere in the country by using their same/existing ration card with **biometric authentication**.
  - A card bearing **10 digit number** will be issued to the complaint state’s BPL card holders which will be linked to AADHAR database.
  - Beneficiaries can lift their entitled foodgrains from any electronic point of sale (ePoS) enabled FPS in the country through portability.

○ This scheme will be instrumental in the welfare of migrant workers.

**Present Status**

- As of January 2020, a total of **12 States** were seamlessly integrated under a single **ONORC** cluster at the national level.
  - Despite the multitude of COVID-19 related challenges in the past year, a total of **32 States/UTs covering around 69 crore NFSA beneficiaries**, i.e. 86% NFSA population in the country, were swiftly brought under the **ONORC plan by December 2020**.
  - The integration of the remaining **four States/UT of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and West Bengal** is expected to be achieved, depending upon the technical readiness of these States to implement the portability of ration cards.
  - The Supreme Court had recently pulled up the West Bengal government for delay in implementation of the ONORC plan in the State.

**Benefits**

- **Huge Internal Migration**: According to the 2011 census, there are 45 crore internal migrants who accounted for 37% of the population.
- **Prevent Duplication and Double Benefits**: It will help in reducing the number of duplicate ration cardholders.
- It will be in sync with the motto of Minimum Government Maximum Governance.
- **Help in understanding migration pattern**: The centralised FRP shop data may be used to formulate policies on intra- and inter-state migration.
- **Better efficiency of Food Distribution Schemes**: As per the reply to an RTI, over 40,000 tonnes of food grains, including wheat and rice, have rotted in the last six years. With ONORC those left out due to migration can take that food.
- **Less Corruption and Exploitation**: Different news articles have reported rampant corruption and exploitation for getting BPL cards by migrants in other states. It will reduce.
- **Empowering BPL Card Holders**: ONORC will give the deprived people the choice to choose from corrupt and well functioning FRP shops.
- **Reduce Social Discrimination**: It will reduce the role of social identities like caste, class and gender and power relations in availing the PDS facility by women and other disadvantaged class.
- **Help towards fulfilling SDG 2 target of ending hunger by 2030**: In the 2020 Global Hunger Index, India ranks 94th out of the 107 countries.
- **Nutritional Security**: With cheap food grain available to migrants, there are chances of more expenditure towards fruits and vegetables.

**Criticism/Challenges**
- **Exclusion Errors**: As the ONORC is AADHAR linked there are chances of exclusion of people living in remote areas especially scheduled tribes.
  - As per the ’2019 state of AADHAR survey’, 95 per cent of the adults in the country have AADHAR.
  - It means the rest 5% may suffer from hunger due to non-availability of AADHAR.
- **Operational Challenges**: Internet penetration is still less in India for the smooth functioning of ONORC.
  - **Changes in Fingerprints** have also been reported both due to genetics and due to constant wear and work-related wear and tear especially in case of labourers.
  - **Logistics Issue**: There is a quota allocated to every state for the purchase of food grains from FCI.
  - Constant migration may disturb that procurement pattern.
    - At places of emigration, food grain may get wasted.
    - While the places where immigration is dominant may face a PDS food crunch.
○ **Split Families**: Many migrants leave their spouses and parents back home. Hence there will be a **requirement to issue cards in parts**.
  - Also there is a lack of **comprehensive data on migrants and their families**.

○ **Domicile based Social Sector Schemes**: There may be tensions over competition for state run social sector schemes due to Common Ration Card which is at present basis for availing such schemes.

### Conclusion and Way Forward

**● To meet Logistic Challenges and optimise the States Procurement:**
- Creation of dedicated ONORC e-platform based on Artificial Intelligence: It may be used to predict and issue the cards to migrants.
- Use of railways data: As shown in the Economic Survey, the preliminary data regarding migration may be taken up from IRCTC.
- **Unorganised Sector Social Security Act 2008**: It has provisions regarding documentation of unorganised informal sector workers at welfare boards.

**● To Handle Operational Challenges:**
- Impetus to BharatNet
- Deeper Internet Penetration should be promoted

**● To eliminate Exclusion Errors:**
- Constant monitoring and empowerment of Village Panchayats at least in the initial phase.
- Social Auditing may weed out any inclusion error and help in reducing exclusion error by recommending the names.

**● The ONORC is just the first step of ensuring mass welfare. Its successful implementation may pave the way for interstate portability** of Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care and other facilities for poor migrant households.

**● In the long run, PDS may be replaced by a food coupon system or direct benefit transfer** for better compliance with World Trade Organisation Rules.

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### About the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013

- **It was enacted in July, 2013** which gives legal entitlement to **67% of the population** (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas) to receive **highly subsidized foodgrains**.
- Under the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**, foodgrain is sold at highly subsidized prices of Rs. 1/-, Rs. 2/- and Rs. 3/- per kg for nutri-cereals, wheat and rice respectively.
- Under sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Act, the term **“eligible households”** comprises two categories
  - **Priority household category** is entitled to 5 kg per person per month.
  - **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** families are entitled to 35 kg per family per
Coverage under the Act is based on the population figures of Census, 2011. The Act is now being implemented in all 36 States/UTs and covers about 81.35 crore persons. This overall figure has been divided among the states and Union Territories, based on the NSSO Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2011-12. The Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution is the nodal ministry for implementing this Act.

**What is a Ration Card?**
- A Ration Card is a document issued under an order or authority of the State Government, as per the Public Distribution System, for the purchase of essential commodities from fair price shops.
- It depends on the number of members in a family and the financial status of the applicant.

Source: TH

**Internal Security**

**Redefining UAPA to Avoid Misuse**

**Syllabus:** GS3/ Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas - Linkages of Organized Crime with Terrorism.

**In News**
The Delhi High Court ruled that there is a need to redefine “terrorist activity” strictly to avoid misuse of UAPA in cases of ordinary penal offences.

**About**
- The Delhi High Court granted bail to three student activists accused in a Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act related to the Delhi riots case.
- The recent data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs indicates a sharp rise in cases registered under UAPA (from 897 in 2015 to 1126 in 2019).

**Delhi High Court's Orders**
- Define Strictly & Narrowly: Delhi HC held that the Court must be careful in employing the definitional words and phrases used in Section 15 in their absolute literal sense which defines “terrorist act”.
  - The UAPA is a stringent anti-terror law, and thus, its provisions must be interpreted more strictly and narrowly, as compared to other conventional penal offences.
Different from Conventional Offences: While reiterating the essence of terrorism as laid down by the Supreme Court in various judgments, the court held that terrorism can’t be conflated with “law and order problems” or “violent protests”.

- In Hitendra Vishnu Thakur case, while calling terrorism an “abnormal phenomenon”, the Supreme Court said that the extent and reach of terrorist activity must travel beyond the effect of an ordinary crime and must not arise merely by causing disturbance of law and order or even public order.
- In PUCL v Union of India, the apex court termed terrorism as acts that challenge the whole nation. Terrorist acts are meant to destabilise the nation by challenging its sovereignty and integrity, razing the constitutional principles, and creating a psyche of fear.

Protests are NOT Terrorism: The court has highlighted that when the protests turn violent, it would prima facie be seen as a “law and order” issue and not as terrorism. The court expressed its concern that the State has blurred the line between the constitutionally guaranteed ‘right to protest’ and ‘terrorist activity’.

Called Out Alleged Misuse: The three orders by the Delhi High Court are perhaps the first instance of a court calling out alleged misuse of the UAPA against individuals in cases that do not necessarily fall in the category of “terrorism” cases.

Quoted Earlier Judgments: The bail orders also refer to how the Supreme Court itself, in the 1994 case of Kartar Singh v State of Punjab, flagged similar concerns against the misuse of another anti-terror law, the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987.

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)
- It was passed in 1967.
- The Act provides special procedures to deal with terrorist activities, among other things.
- Unlawful activity means any conduct which constitutes a crime or which contravenes any law whether such conduct occurred before or after the commencement of this Act and whether such conduct occurred in the Republic or elsewhere.
- Section 15 of the UAPA defines “terrorist act” and is punishable with imprisonment for a term of at least five years to life. In case the terrorist act results in death, the punishment is death or imprisonment for life.
- The Act assigns absolute power to the central government, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- The provisions of this Act apply also to—
  (a) citizens of India outside India;
  (b) persons in the service of the Government, wherever they may be; and
  (c) persons on ships and aircrafts, registered in India, wherever they may be.

Issues with UAPA
- Criminalizing Thoughts: It criminalizes mere thoughts and political protests that cause “disaffection” with the state. It is an assault of citizens’ right to expression which is also a collective right of groups and unions to disseminate their views.
- Ignoring Fundamental Rights: It can simply be used to bypass fundamental rights and procedures. For instance, those arrested under UAPA can be incarcerated up to 180 days without a charge sheet being filed. It thus directly violates Article 21 of the constitution.
**Highly Discretionary:** It confers upon the government broad discretionary powers and also authorizes the creation of special courts with the ability to use secret witnesses and to hold closed-door hearings.

**Hindering dissent:** It is being used to suppress dissent through intimidation and harassment thus threatening the very existence of public debate and freedom of press and criminalizing the performance of civil liberties.

**Parliamentary Powers:** The issue still remains whether the Parliament under any circumstance can classify the individual as terrorist only because it believes him to be involved in terrorism without any trial or whatsoever.

**Restricts Freedoms:** UAPA empowers the parliament to restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens to protect ‘the sovereignty and integrity of India’.

**Stringent Provision of bail:** The standard for bail under the UAPA is that it cannot be granted unless the court is of the view that the accused is innocent of the alleged offence. This is a prima facie standard, which means that the onus of proof of innocence, even for the purpose of obtaining bail, is effectively reversed. It is for the accused to show, for the purposes of bail, that he is innocent.

**Sharp Rise in Use:** This caution is significant given the sharp surge in the state’s use of this provision in a sweeping range of alleged offences - against tribals in Chhattisgarh, those using social media through proxy servers in Jammu and Kashmir; and journalists in Manipur among others.

**Way Forward**

- A **strong anti-terrorism law** is needed in India, but its enforcement will always result in some draconian anomalies like the arrests of activists.
- The existing UAPA does have effective provisions to combat terrorism (cognizable offence) but there are also **some defects and demerits** which needs to be addressed properly to make the law **effective and efficient** to prevent and combat terrorism.
- The UAPA is a **fairly harsh law** drafted to deal with some harsh circumstances and with people spending more than a decade in jail before being acquitted, its potential for misuse has been realised.
- UAPA, in relaxing timelines for the state to file chargesheets and its stringent conditions for bail, gives the state **more powers** compared to the Indian Penal Code.
- The Act **needs to be amended**, in order to ensure a constitutional functionary who is independent from the Executive, be in charge of sanctions for prosecutions and investigations under this Act. Maybe a High Court Judge could be designated for this purpose.
- Terrorism and unlawful activities are ones that always create political issues. If the Act has to work, its application must, at all times, look **apolitical**.

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**Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) Amendment Bill 2019**

- The Bill additionally empowers the government to designate individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.
- **Who may commit terrorism:** Under the Act, the central government may designate an organisation as a terrorist organisation if it:
(i) commits or participates in acts of terrorism,
(ii) prepares for terrorism,
(iii) promotes terrorism, or
(iv) is otherwise involved in terrorism.

- **Approval for seizure of property by NIA:**
  - Under the Act, an investigating officer is required to obtain the **prior approval of the Director General of Police** to seize properties that may be connected with terrorism.
  - The Bill adds that if the investigation is conducted by an officer of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of such property.

- **Investigation by NIA:**
  - Under the Act, investigation of cases may be conducted by officers of the rank of **Deputy Superintendent** or Assistant Commissioner of Police or above.
  - The Bill additionally empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases.

- **Insertion to schedule of treaties:**
  - The Act defines terrorist acts to include acts committed within the scope of any of the treaties listed in a schedule to the Act.
  - The Schedule lists nine treaties, including the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997), and the Convention against Taking of Hostages (1979).
  - The Bill adds another treaty to the list -- This is the International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005).

Sources: IE+TH

### Science and Technology

**New Shephard**

**Syllabus:** GS 3, Science & Technology, Developments, Applications & Effects on Everyday Life, Space

**In News**

Recently, Blue Origin has concluded the **online auction for the first seat on the New Shephard rocket system.**

- Blue Origin is an American **privately funded aerospace manufacturer** and **sub-orbital spaceflight services** company **founded by Jeff Bezos**, who is also the founder of the multinational e-commerce giant Amazon.
About the Auction

- Over 7,600 people registered from 159 countries to bid for this seat, which ultimately went for a winning bid of USD 28 million, with the winner’s identity yet not disclosed.
- The winning bidder will get to fly aboard New Shephard, when it takes its first human flight on 20th July 2021, which marks the 52nd anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin’s moon landing.
  - On the same date in 1969, Armstrong and Aldrin became the first humans ever to land on the moon as part of the Apollo 11 mission.

New Shephard

- It is a rocket system meant to take tourists to space over 100 km above the Earth and accommodation for payloads.
- It completed its seventh test launch successfully in October 2020 when it took off from Texas.
- It has been named after astronaut Alan Shephard, who was the first American to go to space.
- It will take astronauts and research payloads past the Karman line, which is the internationally recognized boundary of space.
  - According to most experts, space starts at the point where orbital dynamic forces become more important than aerodynamic forces, or where the atmosphere alone is not enough to support a flying vessel at suborbital speeds.
  - Historically, it’s been difficult to pin that point at a particular altitude.
  - In the 1900s, Hungarian physicist Theodore von Kármán determined the boundary to be around 50 miles up, or roughly 80 kilometers above sea level.
  - Based on that, the Kármán line is set at an imaginary boundary that is 62 miles up, or roughly a hundred kilometers above sea level.
  - In 2004, test pilot Mike Melville became the first private astronaut to fly beyond the Karman Line.
- **Design and Functionality**
  - The rocket system consists of **two parts**, the **cabin/capsule** and the **rocket/booster**.
  - The cabin can accommodate **experiments from small Mini Payloads up to 100 kg**, which provide easier and cheaper space access to students of educational institutions developing their own space programs.
  - The cabin is **designed for six people** and **sits atop a 60 feet tall rocket**. It is fully **autonomous** and does not require a pilot.
  - It **separates from it before crossing the Karman line**, after which both vehicles fall back to the Earth.
    - After separating from the booster, the capsule free falls in space, while the booster performs an **autonomously controlled vertical landing** back to Earth.
    - The capsule, on the other hand, lands back with the help of parachutes.
The system is a **fully reusable, vertical takeoff and vertical landing space vehicle** that accelerates for about 2.5 minutes before the engine cuts off.

**Significance**
- It will provide **easier and more cost-effective access to space** for purposes such as academic research, corporate technology development and entrepreneurial ventures among others.
- It will also **allow space tourists to experience microgravity** by taking them 100 km above the Earth.
  - **Microgravity** is the condition in which **people or objects appear to be weightless** and the effects can be seen when astronauts and objects float in space.

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**New Shepard: Reusable rocket designed to take passengers into space**

- **Capsule** can hold up to six people.
- **Air brakes** deploy on descent to reduce speed by half.
- **Engine** propels rocket into space and restarts for controlled landing.
- **Landing gear** deploys for touchdown.

Source: Blue Origin
Space Tourism

- The ‘fairly new’ concept seeks to give laypeople the ability to go to space for recreational, leisure or business purposes.
- It is another niche segment of the aviation industry that makes space more accessible to those individuals who are not astronauts and want to go to space for non-scientific purposes.
- Since space tourism is extremely expensive, it is a case of a very small segment of consumers that are able and willing to purchase a space experience.
- History
  - In 1997, a private company called Space Adventures was founded to offer bookable space-related adventures and send paying customers to orbital space so far.
  - In 2001, Dennis Tito, a US millionaire, became the first space tourist on a Russian Soyuz spacecraft to visit the International Space Station (ISS).
  - In 2009, the Russian space agency stopped selling tickets to private citizens.
- Currently, apart from Blue Origin, Virgin Galactic and SpaceX are the major players in the space tourism industry.
  - In 2018, Blue Origin was one of the companies selected by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to conduct studies and advance technologies to collect, process and use space-based resources for missions to the Moon and Mars.
  - In 2019, both signed an agreement that gives Blue Origin permission to use NASA’s historic test stand.
- The current approach to space tourism and the development of vehicles to access space are virtually all based on extensions of current rocket launch vehicle and rocket plane development.
- Also, there have been concerns regarding the health of the passengers and accumulation of black carbon in the stratosphere, further increasing the danger of climate change.
- In order to take a longer-term view of space travel and the development of safer ways to lift humans into Earth orbit and travel into space, new technologies will be needed.

Source: IE
International Relations

Sri Lanka’s Dwindling GSP+ Status

Syllabus: GS2, India and Foreign Relations, Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests

In News
Recently, the European Parliament has urged the European Union (EU) Commission to consider temporary withdrawal of the GSP+ status given to Sri Lanka.

Background
- According to the European Commission, the EU is Sri Lanka’s second-largest trading partner, after China, and its second main export destination, absorbing 22.4 per cent of Sri Lankan exports in 2020, mainly textiles and clothing.
- Sri Lanka had regained the GSP+, or the EU’s ‘Generalised Scheme of Preferences’ in 2017, after Sri Lanka’s commitment to implement 27 international conventions on:
  - Human Rights
  - Labour Conditions
  - Protection of Environment
  - Good Governance
- The status effectively removed import duties on goods from Sri Lanka entering the EU.
- The recent step has been taken in the backdrop of draconian human rights violations and use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in the country.
- Thus, this resolution has put the spotlight back on Sri Lanka’s human rights situation.

Sri Lanka’s Stand
- Rejecting claims that the PTA is systematically used for arbitrary detentions, the government said it was “revisiting provisions” of the Act to propose “necessary amendments”, drawing upon international best practices.
- GSP+ concessions accorded to the country, contributed significantly to
  - Higher production and investment
  - Improvement of human capital
  - Growth of the fisheries sector
- On the other hand, Sri Lanka is of the view that the government is working out strategies to position itself to export Sri Lankan products in a competitive business environment rather than depending on trade concessions such as GSP.

Other Major Issues in Sri Lanka
● Continuing discrimination and violence towards religious and ethnic minorities.
● Serious concern about the 20th Amendment passed in 2020.
● Decline in judiciary’s independence.
● Reduction of parliamentary control.
● Excessive accumulation of power with the presidency.
● Accelerating militarisation of civilian government functions.
● Appointment of serving or former military and intelligence personnel on key administrative posts since 2020.

Scope of China's Involvement
● China may interfere and make this situation fruitful on its own.
● It can provide better import and export duties just to win on this front and make Sri Lanka give away more of its ports and infrastructure constructions.

Generalised Scheme of Preference
● It was instituted in 1971 under the aegis of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
  ○ UNCTAD asked developed countries to help developing countries integrate into the world economy.
● It has contributed over the years to creating an enabling trading environment for developing countries.
● The objective of UNCTAD’s support on GSP and other preferential arrangements is to help developing countries, particularly least developed countries (LDCs), to increase utilization of GSP and other trade preferences and in turn promote productive capacity development and increased trade.
● Such Support Includes
  ○ Raising awareness and enhancing understanding among exporters and government officials in beneficiary countries of the trading opportunities available under the schemes.
  ○ Strengthening understanding of technical and administrative regulations and laws governing preferential market access, particularly rules of origin.
  ○ Disseminating relevant information for users of GSP and other preferential schemes.
● The following 13 countries grant GSP preferences: Australia, Belarus, Canada, the European Union (EU), Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA.
● In the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Decision in 2005, the members agreed that developed countries and developing countries in a position to do so would grant duty-free and quota-free market access for exports of LDCs.
• **Challenges** arise for beneficiaries in fully exploiting the market access opportunities available under these schemes, including in effectively meeting the **rules of origin** requirements.
  o **Rules of origin** are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product.
  o Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and restrictions in several cases depend upon the source of imports.

**European Union’s GSP**
- The EU's GSP removes import duties from products coming into the EU market from **vulnerable developing countries**.
- This helps developing countries to **alleviate poverty and create jobs** based on international values and principles, including labour and human rights.
- **EU offers 3 types of GSP:**
  o **Standard GSP**: It is for low and lower-middle income countries and means a partial or full removal of customs duties on two thirds of tariff lines.
  o **GSP+**
    ■ It is the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance.
    ■ It slashes these same tariffs to 0 per cent for **vulnerable low and lower-middle income countries** that implement 27 international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, protection of the environment and good governance.
    ■ **Beneficiaries**: Armenia, Bolivia, Cabo Verde, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, The Philippines and Sri Lanka.
  o **Everything But Arms (EBA)**: The special arrangement for least developed countries, providing them with duty-free, quota-free access for all products except arms and ammunition.

• **Conditions**
  o **Developing countries are automatically granted GSP if they:**
    ■ Are classified as having an income level below "upper middle income" by the World Bank.
    ■ Do not benefit from another arrangement (like a Free Trade Agreement) granting them preferential access to the EU market.
  o In addition, if granted GSP+, beneficiaries are required to **ratify 27 international conventions** and to **cooperate with the Commission** to monitor implementation of these conventions.
○ Least-developed countries are automatically granted the benefits of the ‘Everything But Arms’ arrangement, even if they have another arrangement in place.
○ All GSP beneficiary countries have to respect the principles of fifteen core conventions on human rights and labour rights.

● Monitoring
○ The EU continuously monitors GSP+ beneficiary countries’ effective implementation of the 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, and good governance.
○ This monitoring includes exchanges of information, dialogue and visits and involves various stakeholders, including civil society.

● Report: The Commission publishes a report on the implementation of GSP every two years on the progress made by the GSP+ beneficiary countries in implementing the 27 international conventions.

Significance of GSP
● It gives opportunities of growth and development to LDCs and most ignored countries.
● It helps in increasing employment rate because more companies would want to invest if they are getting better import/export tariffs.
● Companies get better value for their sales overseas.

Conclusion
● All eyes are on Sri Lanka now that may deter its actions of discrimination and violence towards its citizens.
● Slashing GSP benefits will impact the finances of the government which can help in acting as another deterrent force against human rights violations.
● However, the temporary suspension of Sri Lanka’s GSP+ status will have a debilitating impact on its exports and the economy.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
● It was established in 1964 as a permanent intergovernmental body.
● UNCTAD is the part of the United Nations Secretariat dealing with-
  ○ Trade.
  ○ Investment.
  ○ Development issues.
● Working at the national, regional, and global level, it help countries to:
  ○ Comprehend options to address macro-level development challenges.
  ○ Achieve beneficial integration into the international trading system.
○ Diversify economies to make them less dependent on commodities.
○ Limit their exposure to financial volatility and debt.
○ Attract investment and make it more development friendly.
○ Increase access to digital technologies.
○ Promote entrepreneurship and innovation.
○ Help local firms move up value chains.
○ Speed up the flow of goods across borders.
○ Protect consumers from abuse.
○ Curb regulations that stifle competition.
○ Adapt to climate change and use natural resources more effectively.

● Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.

Sri Lanka’s Human Rights Violation

● There was continued impunity for violations committed during the internal armed conflict, and the government failed to uphold commitments to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) around justice and reconciliation.

● Background
  ○ The Internal Armed Conflict which ended in 2009 accused both parties, the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), of war crimes and other serious violations and abuses of international human rights law.
  ○ The new government announced its intention to withdraw support for UNHRC resolution 40/1 and all linked resolutions promoting post-war reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka.
  ○ In October, the Constitution was amended, with serious implications for independent institutions including the National Human Rights Commission and the Police Commission, as well as the independence of the domestic judiciary and the police.

● Enforced Disappearances
  ○ The government announced its intention to review the Act establishing the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), the permanent body established during the previous government in line with commitments to the UNHRC with a mandate to investigate the fate of “the missing” in the country.
  ○ Later, the practice of issuing interim relief to families of the disappeared, as recommended by the OMP and carried out during the previous
administration, was discontinued, putting these families under further financial strain.

- **Lawyers** involved in cases of enforced disappearance, especially **Navy 11 case and the Navatkuli case**, faced intimidation and attacks on social media.
- In both cases, members of the Sri Lankan armed forces were suspected perpetrators.

**Impunity**

- Little or no progress was made towards accountability for violations and abuses committed during the armed conflict and in the post-conflict period.
- Sri Lanka failed to establish a judicial mechanism with special counsel to investigate allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law as promised at the UNHRC.
- There was no notable progress in the investigations of the killings of journalists and other people who fought for Human Rights.
- Pardoning and acquitting people of the ruling party family, who are involved in heinous crimes of murder, on baseless charges.
- Several military officers who, according to the findings of various UN investigations, could be responsible for crimes under international law were also promoted during the year and appointed to powerful positions within the administration.

**On Freedoms of Expression and Association**

- Human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and criminal investigators came under increased intimidation and harassment during the year.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, the police announced that they would take legal action against those who publish posts on social media criticizing government officials and obstructing their duties.
- Thousands of people were arrested for violating the Covid-19 curfew, despite it having no legal basis.
- The pandemic also led to an increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric in social and mainstream media, in some instances by senior government members.
- The authorities carried out forced cremations (forbidden by the Muslim faith) of Muslims who died from Covid-19, despite domestic directives at the time allowing for burials. **WHO guidelines allowed for either burials or cremations for the safe management of a corpse in the context of Covid-19.**

**Violence Against Women and Children**

- There was continued impunity for sexual and gender-based violence, despite repeated assurances by consecutive governments to tackle the issue.

**Discrimination**
○ Malayaha Tamil estate labourers and their families continued to suffer marginalization and poverty, lack of income during the Covid-19 pandemic.
○ Children in plantation estates were deprived access to online education during the pandemic because of a lack of computers and internet access in their homes.

• LGBTQIA+ Community
○ Sections of the Penal Code that prohibit “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” and “gross indecency between persons” continued to be used to persecute, harass and discriminate against the people of the community.

• Death Penalty
○ In 2019, former President Maithripala Sirisena signed death warrants for four death row prisoners who had been convicted of drug-related crimes.
○ The Supreme Court granted a temporary reprieve while cases challenging the order were heard in court. The case was ongoing at the end of 2020 and the stay of executions was extended.
○ Sri Lanka has not carried out any executions since 1976.

Source: TH
| Raja Parba Festival | Recently, the Prime Minister of India has greeted the people of Odisha on the festival of Raja Parba.  
  - Odisha observes Raja Parba festival to **combat prejudices that surround the menstrual cycle** and celebrates a girl’s womanhood.  
  - A **four-day festival** celebrated **every year in June**, it calls for women to come together and **acknowledge the gift of Mother Earth** or Bhudevi.  
    - According to religious belief, it is said that during the **first three days**, ‘Bhudevi’, the wife of Lord Jagannath **undergoes a menstruation cycle** and on the **fourth day**, she is given a **ceremonial bath**.  
  - The festival is **natively pronounced as ‘raw-jaw’**, while ‘Raja’ is derived from the word ‘Rajaswala’ which means **menstruating women**.  
  - Each day of the festival has its own name and significance.  
    - The first day is called **Pahili Rajo**.  
    - The second day is **Mithuna Sankranti**, which signifies the beginning of the solar month of Mithuna i.e., the rainy season.  
    - The third day is **Bhu Daaha or Basi Raja**.  
    - The fourth day is called **Vasumati Snana**.  
  - During the festival, girls play around **swings tied on tree branches**, along with other indoor and outdoor games. |
Recently, **Retail inflation** has hit a **six-month high of 6.3 per cent in May**, due to persistent rise in fuel and edible oil prices.

- The **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** monitors retail prices at **a certain level** for a particular commodity; price movement of goods and services at rural, urban and all-India levels.
- The change in the price index over a period of time is referred to as **CPI-based inflation, or retail inflation**.
- Generally, CPI is used as a **macroeconomic indicator of inflation**, as a tool by the central bank and government for inflation targeting and for inspecting price stability, and as a deflator in the national accounts.
- CPI also helps understand the real value of salaries, wages and pensions, the purchasing power of the nation’s currency and regulating rates.
- It gives an idea of the **cost of the standard of living**.
- If there is inflation (when goods and services cost more) the CPI will rise over a period of time. If the CPI drops, that means there is deflation (steady reduction in the prices of goods and services).
- **CPI formula:** \( \text{CPI} = \left( \frac{\text{Price of basket in current period}}{\text{Price of basket in base period}} \right) \times 100 \).

### Inflation

- It refers to the **rise in the prices of most goods and services** of daily or common use, such as food, clothing, housing, etc.
- Inflation measures the average price change in a basket of commodities and services over time.
- Inflation is indicative of the **decrease in the purchasing power** of a unit of a country’s currency. This could ultimately lead to a **deceleration in economic growth**.
- However, a moderate level of inflation is required in the economy to ensure that production is promoted.
- In India, the **NSO under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** measures inflation.
- In India, inflation is primarily measured by **two main indices**
  - WPI (Wholesale Price Index) and
  - CPI (Consumer Price Index)
These measure wholesale and retail-level price changes, respectively.
Recently, the Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar has developed a device called ‘Jivan Vayu’.

- It is India’s first such device—India’s first Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) device which functions even without electricity and is adapted to both kinds of oxygen generation units like O2 cylinders and oxygen pipelines in hospitals.
- These provisions are not available in otherwise existing CPAP machines so Jivan Vayu can be used as their substitutes.
  - CPAP is a treatment method for patients having breathing problems during sleep called sleep apnea and to treat infants whose lungs have not fully developed.
  - The machine uses mild air pressure to keep the airways open for easy breathing.
  - The treatment is all the more necessary during early stages of the Covid-19 infection as it reduces lung damage and allows patients to recover from the inflammatory effects.
- Jivan Vayu is leak-proof, low-cost, customisable and can run during power failures.
- It has an inbuilt viral filter at the air entertainment end which has a viral efficacy of 99.99 per cent.
- The device has been manufactured using 3D printing and has also been tested mechanically.
- It can deliver high flow oxygen (20-60 LPM) while maintaining a continuous positive pressure of up to 20 cm H2O.

(Image Courtesy: PIB)
India’s foreign exchange reserves crossed the $600 billion mark for the first time.

- Foreign exchange reserves are important assets held by the central bank in foreign currencies as reserves.
  - Most of the reserves are usually held in US dollars given the currency’s importance in the international financial and trading system.
  - Some central banks keep reserves in Euros, British pounds, Japanese yen or Chinese yuan in addition to their US dollar reserves.
- They are commonly used to support the exchange rate and set monetary policy.
- India’s forex reserves include Foreign Currency Assets (FCA), Gold reserves, Special Drawing Rights (SDR), Reserve Tranche Position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The forex reserves are managed by the Reserve Bank of India for the Indian government and the main component is foreign currency assets and they act as the first line of defence for India in case of economic crisis.
- Significance
  - It also limits external vulnerability by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.
  - The reserve facilitates external trade and payment and promotes orderly development and maintenance of foreign exchange market in India.
- Countries with the highest foreign reserves
  - Currently, China has the largest reserves followed by Japan, Switzerland, Russia and India on the International Monetary Fund table.
  - India is very close to overtaking Russia to become the fourth largest country with foreign exchange reserves.
- Initiatives taken by the government to increase forex
  - Atma Nirbhar Bharat, in which India has to be made a self-reliant nation so that India does not have to import things that India can produce.
- The government has started schemes like **Duty Exemption Scheme, Remission of Duty or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP), Nirvik (Niryat Rin Vikas Yojana) scheme** etc.
- Apart from these schemes, India is one of the top countries that attracted the highest amount of **Foreign Direct Investment**, thereby improving India’s foreign exchange reserves.
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<th>New Atlantic Charter</th>
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| Recently, President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson inspected documents related to the Atlantic Charter.  
  - The two leaders plan to sign what they’re calling a new Atlantic Charter, pledging to “defend the principles, values, and institutions of democracy and open societies.”  
  - The Atlantic Charter is a declaration signed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in August 1941, setting out common goals for the world after the Second World War.  
  - Those goals included freer trade, disarmament and the right to self-determination of all people, they desired no territorial changes without the free assent of the peoples concerned, neither nation sought any aggrandizement.  
    - They hoped to promote worldwide collaboration to improve labour standards, economic progress, and social security.  
  - It is often cited as a cornerstone of the trans-Atlantic “special relationship”. |
A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between NHPC Limited and Bihar State Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited (BSHPC) for Implementation of the Dagmara Hydro-Electric Project over the Kosi River in Supaul district.

Dagmara multipurpose hydropower project— is coming up 31 km downstream on Kosi river under Bhaptiyahi block in Supaul district

The cost of Project is presently considered as Rs 2435.91 crore to be actualized as appraised by CEA during Detailed Project Report (DPR) clearance.

The total generation capacity of the ‘Run-of-River’ project will be 130.1 MW, which will comprise two power houses, while the barrage length would be 753 metre and it would have 36 gates on river Kosi River.

The Government of Bihar shall purchase the entire power to be generated from the Project for its complete life.

It is the largest hydropower project of Bihar to be implemented by NHPC on ownership basis.

Significance
- The project would contribute immensely in India’s mission for energy transition for lesser use of fossil fuel.
- It will create immense opportunities for generating both direct and indirect employment in Bihar.
- It will also uplift the socio-economic condition in the project area.

NHPC
- It is a Category-A Miniratna Company under the Ministry of Power, Government of India in the field of Hydropower.
- Currently, NHPC has 24 operational power stations with a total installed capacity of 7071 MW.
Recently, NATO leaders declared that China poses a constant security challenge and is working to undermine global order.

- NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April 4, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the erstwhile Soviet Union.
- Its headquarters are located in Evere, Brussels, Belgium, while the headquarters of Allied Command Operations is near Mons, Belgium and
- It has 30 members at present mainly in Europe and North America.
- Its purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.
- **Political Objective:** It promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **Military Objective:** It is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.