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General Studies-2

India and Brazil

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved an agreement on bilateral legal and criminal cooperation to be sealed during the coming visit of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil.

Background:

- Mr. Bolsonaro is India's chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations.
- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Bolsonaro have met twice in 2019.
- Bilateral relations were elevated to a Strategic Partnership in 2006, heralding a new phase in India-Brazil relations.
- Trade relations: Bilateral trade stands at about \$8 billion.
- 2018 Indian investments in Brazil were around U.S.\$ 6 billion and Brazilian investments in India are estimated at U.S.\$ 1 billion.

Current developments:

- Among about 20 agreements set to be exchanged, are the Strategic Partnership Action Plan, along with the BIT, a Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement (MLAT) on crime, agreements on double taxation avoidance, bio-energy or ethanol production, cybersecurity, health, mining, oil and gas exploration and investment, and animal husbandry.
- Social Security Agreement (SSA): Brazil and India will also exchange a Social Security Agreement (SSA), first signed in March 2017.

Significance:

- The Strategic Partnership Action Plan will serve as an “umbrella agreement”, for plans between the two countries to increase defence cooperation, technology sharing and a logistics agreement.
- First bilateral investment treaty (BIT) since 2015:
- The Bilateral Investment treaty will be one of the first that the Modi government will sign since 2015, when it decided to scrap all existing treaties with 83 countries, and brought in a new “Model BIT”.
- Since then India has been able to sign BITs with Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, has concluded an agreement with Cambodia.
- Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of early childhoods will strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries and increase bilateral cooperation on the issues of early childhood care.

- Social Security Agreement (SSA): It will allow investments in each other's pension funds, to help business processes and encourage the flow of investment.
- MLAT aims to enhance the effectiveness of both the countries in investigation and prosecution of crime through cooperation and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.
- The MoU in the energy sector will allow for joint exploration in the petroleum and natural gas segment

Democracy index

Why in news?

- India has slipped 10 places in the 2019 Democracy Index to 51st position.
- In 2018, India was ranked at 41.
- The Democracy Index (began in 2006) which is prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit, provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide in 165 independent states and two territories.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit is the research and analysis division of The Economist Group, which is the sister company to The Economist newspaper.

Democracy Index

- Based on five categories:
 - Civil liberties,
 - Electoral process and pluralism;
 - Functioning of government;
 - Political participation; and
 - Political culture.
- The countries are scored on a scale of 0 to 10 on 60 indicators within the above categories.
- Based on their scores, each country is classified as one of four types of regimes:
 - Full democracy (scores greater than 8);
 - Flawed democracy (greater than 6 and up to 8);
 - Hybrid regime (greater than 4 and up to 6); and
 - Authoritarian regime (less than or equal to 4).
- Fall in Global Score
- The average global score has fallen from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44 in 2019. This is the worst average global score since 2006.
- Cause: Driven by sharp regressions in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, four out of the five categories that make up the global average score have deteriorated.
- There are only 22 “full democracies” as compared to 54 “authoritarian regimes” and as many “flawed democracies”.
- Almost one-half (48.4%) of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort, although only 5.7% reside in a “full democracy”, down from 8.9% in 2015 as a result of the US being



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demoted from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” in 2016.

- The total score of some 68 countries declined from 2018, but almost as many (65) recorded an improvement.
- Thailand registered the biggest improvement in score owing to an election in March 2019, which was the first since the military coup d'état in May 2014.
- China registered the greatest decline because of discrimination against minorities, especially in Xinjiang, and digital surveillance of the population.

India's Performance

- Fall in Score: India's score is down from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in 2019. This is the lowest score since 2006.
- Primary Cause: Erosion of civil liberties in the country. Specified examples include:
- Stripping of Jammu and Kashmir's special status with the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A and the various security measures that followed the bifurcation of the state including restriction of Internet access.
- The exclusion of 1.9 million people from the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and with the majority of people excluded being Muslims.
- On the Citizenship Amendment Act, the report said that the law has enraged the large muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.
- Flawed Democracy: India's score of 7.23 places it in the “flawed democracy” category i.e. countries that hold free and fair elections and where basic civil liberties are respected, but have significant weaknesses in aspects of democracy, such as problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.
- Comparison with Other Countries: In Asia and Australasia region, India ranks eighth, even behind countries like Taiwan and Timor-Leste. The United States, with a score of 7.96 that is just below the benchmark for a “full democracy”, is a “flawed democracy”, in the same category as India.
- Bangladesh (5.88) is in a “flawed democracy” category.
- Pakistan, with a score of 4.25, is categorised as a “hybrid democracy”;
- China (2.26) and North Korea (bottom-ranked with 1.08) are categorised as “authoritarian regimes”; and
- Norway (top-ranked with 9.87) is counted as a “full democracy”. Following Norway at the top of the rankings are Iceland (9.58), Sweden (9.39) and New Zealand (9.26). Other “full democracies” include Germany, the United Kingdom and France.

Death penalty

Why in news?

- The Central government has filed a petition before the Supreme Court, seeking a time limit of seven days for death row convicts to file a mercy plea.
- The petition seeks appropriate modifications to the judgement passed in 2014, during the



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case of Shatrughan Chauhan versus the Union of India and others.

- The above judgment defined the procedure and guidelines to be adopted in cases of prisoners on death row.
- The move comes in the backdrop of various pleas filed by convicts in the Nirbhaya gang-rape case (2012) that have delayed their hanging.

Other Demands

- Imposition of a time limit to file curative and review petitions for death row convicts.
- Mandatory issuance of death warrant of a convict within seven days of the rejection of his mercy petition by the competent courts, State governments, prison authorities in the country.
- Execution of the death sentence within seven days after the issuance of death warrant of the convict irrespective of the stage of review petition/curative petition/mercy petition of his co-convicts.

Background

- There are instances where the death sentence is not executed because the co-convicts either by default or by design choose to file review or curative or mercy petition one after the other, even at a belated stage. This causes a delay in the execution of the sentence of other co-convicts whose mercy petition has already been rejected.
- The existing guidelines to execute the death penalty are more "convict-centric" rather than "victim-centric". As these guidelines do not take into account an irreparable mental trauma of the victims and their family members, the collective conscience of the nation.
- Over the years, it has been observed that convicts of heinous crimes misuse Article 21 (Right to life) to delay the judicial proceedings and in turn death sentences.

Another extension for OBC sub-categorisation panel

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved a six-month extension in the tenure of the commission to examine sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Key points:

- The commission was appointed in 2017 with an initial time frame of 12 weeks.
- The commission was appointed to look into the existing list of OBCs and categorise the castes that have not benefited from reservation in government jobs and education.
- It is one of the efforts of the Government to achieve greater social justice and inclusion for all.
- The Cabinet also approved an addition to the commission's terms of reference.
- The commission will now also study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling

or transcription.

- It is also expected to give its recommendations to ensure that these marginalised communities get the benefits of various schemes.

Women politicians trolled more: Amnesty India

Why in News?

- Amnesty India had carried out a study of 95 politicians during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India.

Findings:

- Twitter is a toxic space for Indian women politicians, who face substantially higher abuse on the social media platform than their counterparts in the U.S. and the U.K., according to a study. One out of every seven tweets mentioning them is problematic or abusive, with many women targeted by a relentless flow of threats and sexist, religious, racist and casteist slurs.
- While all women are targeted, Muslim women politicians faced 55% more abuse than others.
- The report quotes one of the women leaders, which say: "Women do not enter politics because the price of constant online harassment and trolling was too high."

Myanmar's growing dependence on China

Why in news?

- Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded a two-day visit to Myanmar.

Background

- The last visit by a Chinese President took place in 2001.
- The 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations was judged to be the ideal occasion to launch a major renewal and strengthen the process of the bilateral relationship.
- With the Myanmar visit, Xi has effectively completed his key neighbourhood trips, having travelled through the Maldives and Sri Lanka in 2014, Pakistan in 2015, Bangladesh in 2016, and Nepal in 2019.

Key Agreements signed during the visit

- During Xi's visit, China and Myanmar have signed a total of 33 agreements, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), protocols, and exchanges of letters on areas including major infrastructure projects, railways, industrial and power projects, trade and investment.
- The two countries agreed on MoUs to undertake a feasibility study on the Myanmar-China Power Interconnection Project in addition to conducting feasibility studies for the Yangon River Estuary West Bank Protection, Mandalay-Bagan Railway Line, and Watalone Tunnel

projects.

- Giving a big boost to China's efforts at seeking a greater presence in the Indian Ocean, the two countries signed a concession agreement and shareholders' agreement for the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) deep seaport project.
- The Kyaukpyu deep seaport is particularly critical for China as it would provide it with an alternative to the Straits of Malacca, which is currently their lifeline for energy transportation as well as a trade corridor.
- Making progress on the Kyaukpyu port is important also because it is linked to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and therefore the China-Myanmar agreement on the port is touted as a big success for the BRI.

Why Myanmar needs China?

- Analysts are sceptical about these projects as there are no significant benefits for Myanmar.
- But the prime reason why they are supporting China is because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is all set to deliver its judgment on the issue of violence against the Rohingya minority. Myanmar seeks support from China on this issue.
- The joint statement issued during the visit stated that "The Chinese side supports the efforts of Myanmar to address the humanitarian situation and to promote peace, stability and development for all communities in Rakhine State."
- For Beijing's support on the Rohingya issue, Naypyidaw has reconsidered some of the earlier tough positions it had taken on stalled projects.
- Because of the internal situation in Myanmar, most western countries are reluctant to fund projects in the country. Xi's visit enhances investments in the country.
- In the first 11 months of 2019, investment from China reached \$20.9 billion, accounting for 25.21% of all foreign direct investment, second only to Singapore.
- Beijing is also supporting Myanmar via tourism: Chinese tourist arrivals increased 150% in 2019 when compared with 2018.

India's Concern

- A Chinese-developed deep seaport in the Bay of Bengal will complete the encirclement of India — with Sri Lanka already having given its Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to China, which has also developed the Gwadar port on Pakistan's coast on the Arabian Sea.
- China has already been given a mediator's status by Dhaka and Naypyitaw in their Rohingya crisis dispute — adding to New Delhi's isolation in South Asia.
- Even Nepal, which will have a high-speed rail link built by China, and Sri Lanka, which has a known pro-China Sri Lankan government, headed by brothers Gotabaya Rajapaksa as president and Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM, are heavily leaning on Beijing.
- From New Delhi's perspective, these are problematic. India has taken a strong position against Belt and Road and it worries about the strategic implications of any Chinese bases in the Bay of Bengal under guise of infrastructural projects



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Environmental clearance

Why in news?

- The Environment Ministry has issued a notification to exempt oil and gas firms from seeking environmental clearance for on-shore and offshore drilling explorations.
- Onshore drilling refers to drilling deep holes under the earth's surface whereas offshore drilling relates to drilling underneath the seabed.
- These drilling methods are used in order to extract natural resources – usually oil and gas – from the earth.

Environmental Concerns

- The exploratory drilling process is an ecologically-intensive exercise that involves digging multiple wells and conducting seismic surveys offshore. Thus exemptions may cause loss of biodiversity.
- The offshore drilling operations can possibly affect fish, lead to a build-up of heavy water contaminants, disorient whales and sea life.
- The risk of oil spills threatens the coastal as well as terrestrial ecosystems.

Hydro chloro fluoro carbon

Why in news?

- India has successfully phased out Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified that the issuance of import license for HCFC-141b is prohibited from 1st January 2020 under Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019.
- Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019 have been issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- This step is among the first at this scale in Article 5 (special status of developing countries) parties under the Montreal Protocol.

Key Points:

- HCFC-141 b is one of the most powerful ozone-depleting chemicals after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- It is mainly used as a blowing agent in the foam manufacturing industries.
- In India, the foam manufacturing sector is a mix of large, medium and small enterprises having varying capacities, with the preponderance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- HCFC-141 b is not produced domestically and all requirements were met through imports.
- India is one of the few countries that are pioneer in the use of non-Ozone Depleting technologies and have a low Global Warming Potential (GWP).
- The Ministry also adopted a structured approach to engage with foam manufacturing enterprises for



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providing technical and financial assistance in order to transition to non-ODS and low GWP technologies under the HCFC Phase-out Management Plan (HPMP).

Vyommitra

Why in news?

- Recently, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) unveiled its first 'woman' astronaut, named VyomMitra who will ride to space in the first test flight of the human space mission, Gaganyaan.

Key Points:

- She is half-humanoid and her body stops at the torso and has no legs. She is capable of switching panel operations, performing Environment Control and Life Support Systems (ECLSS) functions, conversations with the astronauts, recognising them and solving their queries.
- The humanoid can detect and give out warnings if environmental changes within the cabin.
- She will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022. She will be sent in a space capsule around the end of 2020 or early 2021 to study how astronauts respond to living outside earth in controlled zero-gravity conditions.
- The humanoid has been developed by the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit, Thiruvananthapuram

Bt.cotton

- Presently, Bt Cotton (Genetically Modified Pest resistant Cotton) has captured more than 95% of the area under cotton cultivation. With a complete monopoly of private sector over one of the major backward linkages (Seed production), it is turning out to be a socio-economic liability for the intended beneficiary (Farmers) itself.

Bt Cotton: Performance so far

- It has catapulted India's position to the world's largest cotton producer, surpassing China in output. In 2019 it is touted to the highest ever: 354 lakh bales.
- Given the largest producer status, it also comes with a rider that India's productivity (yield per unit area), is much lower than other major cotton-producing countries, meaning a much larger area is used for cotton production.

Suitability for India: Hybrid vs Varieties

- Cotton being a dryland is mostly cultivated in such areas which are rain-fed with low irrigation facilities, making farmers exclusively dependent on monsoon. So, shorter duration variety holds promise as it reduces dependence on irrigation and risk.
- Shorter duration ensures that when cotton bolls develop and water requirement is the



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highest then, the inadequate soil moisture(owing to withdrawal of Monsoon) doesn't hinder their growth.

- Also, other advantages such as nearly double productivity, reduced fertilizer needs and water requirement, and less vulnerability from insect pests due to a shorter field duration makes Varieties more suitable for India.
- Yet, India has persisted with long-duration hybrids, many years after benefits of compact varieties became clear from global experience. The hybrid seed model for cotton that India, and India alone has followed for over three decades, has proved inferior to the HDP model.

Critical Analysis of Hybrid Cotton Policy in India:

- Pre GMO: This phase of policy ranges from 1980-2002 when India persisted with hybrids while other countries shifted to HDP (High density Planting).
- Public sector institutions and Cotton research centres ignored such a significant innovation in cotton breeding (HDP) ,in turn such varieties couldn't see the light of the day.
- At the time of GMO Introduction :Post 2002, when Bt cotton was being considered for introduction into India, the deliberation of hybrids versus compact varieties could have been undertaken.
- The International experience could have been evaluated ,including the context of introduction of this new technology along with the form(Hybrid vs. Varieties)
- Additionally, Agro-economic conditions should have been a guiding factor.
- However, the scope of evaluation by the GM regulatory process in India was narrow, and did not take this into account.

Impact of Hybrid Policy:

- Farmer Distress and negative impact on Livelihoods
- Given the sheer scale of Cotton seed industry vis-a-vis Hybrid Cotton, it springs no surprise that it has constrained the very much larger value of cotton production and the overall cotton industry.
- High input and high risk model of Hybrid Cotton has been a probable factor agricultural distress in cotton farmers. Low input low risk model of compact varieties would have significantly reduced distress as well as increased yield.
- As a result of it, , commercial Bt hybrids have overshadowed the market, accompanied by rollback of public sector cotton seed production.
- So, it has become imperative for Indian farmers to use Bt hybrid seed produced by private seed companies.