



INNOVATIVE IAS

Daily News Analysis

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General studies-2

It is up to States to provide 10% EWS quota: Centre

Why in news?

- The Centre has informed the Supreme Court that it would be the States' prerogative to provide 10% economic reservation in government jobs and admission to educational institutions.

Background:

- As per the notification issued by the Department of Personnel and Training in January 2019, persons whose family has a gross annual income below 8 lakh are identified as those belonging to the economically weaker section.
- It said the 10% reservation law was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes.
- The economic reservation was introduced in the Constitution by amending Articles 15 and 16 and adding clauses empowering the government to provide reservation on the basis of economic backwardness.
- The court had refused to pass any interim order to stay or hamper the implementation of the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, which provides for the 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the economically backward in the unreserved category.

Key points:

- In an affidavit, the Centre said: "Whether or not to provide reservation to the economically weaker section in appointment to State government jobs and admission to State government educational institutions, as per provisions of the newly inserted Articles 15(6) and 16(6) of the Constitution, is to be decided by the State government concerned."
- However, the Centre said its Department of Social Justice and Empowerment "has no role in deciding the reservation policy of any State government".

Issues:

- It has been nearly six months since a Bench, led by Justice Sharad A. Bobde, now the Chief Justice of India, had reserved orders on the preliminary question that whether a bunch of writ petitions challenging the economic reservation law should be referred to a Constitution Bench.
- The petitions have challenged the validity of the law, saying the 50% quota limit is part of the basic structure of the Constitution, and the new law has tinkered with it.



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GST conference:

Why in news?

- The 2nd National GST Conference of the Commissioners of State Tax and Chief Commissioners of Central Tax was held recently.
- The conference was focused on streamlining Goods and Services Tax (GST) system and plugging revenue leakages.
- The conference was aimed to build synergy and to share their knowledge and best practices with the intent to bring about uniformity in tax administrations.

Key Points:

- The government has decided to constitute a panel of centre and state officials for designing a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to check fraudulent GST refund claims and evasion of GST.
- A memorandum of understanding would be signed among the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) and the GST Network to exchange data through the application program interface.
- The data would be shared on a quarterly basis, instead of being shared on a yearly basis.
- It was also decided to make the GST system aligned with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) for the purpose of getting bank account details and transactions and also PAN-based banking transaction.

Mindset to blame for poor response to NPS'

Why in news?

- Of the 7,000 corporates in the country that are currently registered with the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), only 10 lakh employees are covered under the National Pension System (NPS).
- The pension segment is yet to see a quantum growth and NPS currently covers only a tiny number of individuals and corporates, while a large population of small, medium, and micro enterprises and thousands of start-ups are yet to be part of the pension market.
- It is found that only 2-4% of employees of the 7,000 registered companies are covered under NPS. This is considered too low a coverage and experts opine that this has to be improved

Key points:

- PFRDA, that is currently in the process of conducting pension awareness campaigns across the country, has the mandate to add five lakh new NPS subscribers and 75 lakh Atal Pension Yojana (APY) subscribers by March 2020.
- The PFRDA is also in the process of creating a strategy to approach each of these companies directly through HRs or through public campaigns.
- NPS would soon be extended to OCIs (Overseas Citizens of India) and to facilitate this, PFRDA's record-keeping department is building an online system as per directives from RBI

and the Ministry of External Affairs.

- To make NPS more attractive, the central government is considering to double tax benefits to Rs. 1 lakh, from 50,000, under Section 80CCD (1b) and to make the annuity income tax-free.
- Also, the Finance Ministry may soon allow PFRDA to become a single regulator for all pension products, to give the entity more validity and standing in the country's under-tapped pension market.

General studies-3

Genome of Indian cobra sequenced

Why in news?

- A consortium of scientists, including some from India, have mapped the genome of the Indian Cobra, among the most poisonous snakes in the country.

Key points:

- India is the snakebite capital of the world.
- The Sind Krait from western India is over 40 times more potent than that of the Spectacled cobra, making it the most toxic Indian snake.
- Though bites from 60 of the 270 species of Indian snakes are known to kill or maim, anti-venom now available is only effective against the 'Big 4.'
- Every year, approximately five million people worldwide are bitten by venomous snakes resulting in about 400,000 amputations and more than 100,000 deaths.
- Each year, about 46,000 people die and 140,000 people are disabled in India from snakebites by the 'Big 4' — the Indian cobra, the common krait, Russell's viper, and the saw-scaled viper.
- Currently, anti-venom is produced by immunising horses with extracted snake venom and is based on a process developed more than 100 years ago. The process is laborious and suffers from a lack of consistency leading to varying efficacy and serious side-effects.

Why is it significant?

- Sequencing a genome is an important step to making anti-venom but wouldn't on its own solve the problem of making and supplying enough of the product to address the huge volume — and variety — of snakebites in India, according to independent scientists.
- High-quality genomes of venomous snakes would enable the generation of a comprehensive catalogue of venom-gland-specific toxin genes that can be used for the development of synthetic anti-venom of defined composition.
- Knowing the sequence of genes could aid in understanding the chemical constituents of the venom and contribute to the development of new anti-venom therapies, which have remained practically unchanged for over a century.



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107 Indian science congress

Why in news?

- During the 107th Indian Science Congress, the Indian Railways has announced that it will build a hydrogen-powered rail engine by the end of 2021.
- The Indian Railways Organisation for Alternate Fuels (IROAF) will be developing a hydrogen-powered rail engine — a technology that has been demonstrated successfully only in Germany so far.

Key Points:

- The proposed train will have four passenger coaches operating at 75 km/hr speed.
- One coach will carry the hydrogen gas cylinders, fuel cells, supercapacitors and DC converters.
- Hydrogen will be the input to the fuel cell and the power output of the fuel cell will drive the train.
- The next phase is to generate hydrogen on board the train from water. This means that water will be converted into hydrogen through water splitting technologies and hydrogen will then be used as the input for fuel cells.
- Hydrogen-powered rail engine will help to reduce reliance on fossil fuel-based energy sources like diesel and electricity and to find alternative sources of fuel to power its trains.

IMD

Why in news?

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has released the 'Statement on Climate of India during 2019'.

Key Findings:

- Deaths due to weather extremes: 2019 was a year of extremes – heat, cold, rain, and cyclones for India, killing a total of 1,562 people. Last year, the total number of deaths caused due to similar weather vagaries was 1,428.
- The state-wise death toll caused due to various extreme weather events: Maharashtra (231), Jharkhand (138), Uttar Pradesh (135), Rajasthan (94), Kerala (86), Odisha (64), Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh (51), Karnataka (43), Himachal Pradesh (27) and Madhya Pradesh (24).

Rainfall:

- The rainfall amounts during both the southwest monsoon (June to September) and northeast monsoon (October to December) remained 109% of the Long Period Average (LPA). That is, the country recorded excess rainfall during the entire year, making it an extremely wet year in recent times, when both monsoons reported above normal rain for the seasons.
- Long Period Average is a 50 year average of India's monsoon rains. The current LPA is 89 cm, based on the average rainfall over the years 1951 and 2000.



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Rise in Temperature

- The mean temperatures remained 0.36 degrees above normal, making 2019 the seventh hottest year ever recorded.
- The decade 2011 – 2019 remained the warmest on record for the country, when the annual mean temperature remained 0.36 degree above normal.
- Since 1901, India has warmed by 1 degree Celsius. Whereas, the rise in minimum temperature was 0.22 degrees in the century.

Number of Cyclones:

- 2019 was exceptional for the number of cyclones that hit India's east and west coasts.
- Previously, similar cyclonic activity was reported in the Indian Ocean only during 1893, 1926, 1930, and 1976. During these years, cyclones formed both in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal put together numbered to ten in a calendar year.
- Notably, an active Arabian Sea saw more cyclonic storms than the Bay of Bengal during 2019. It was only for the second time in 117 years that the Arabian Sea saw such intense and frequent cyclones.
- In 2019, eight cyclonic storms formed over the north Indian Ocean, of these, five — Cyclones Vayu, Hikka, Kyarr, Maha and Pavan originated in the Arabia Sea, which is normally calmer. On the contrary, the Bay of Bengal reported less than normal number of cyclones. The three cyclones formed here were — Cyclones Pabuk, Fani, Bulbul.
- The Bay of Bengal sees an average of five cyclones each year, making 2019 a year when the Arabian Sea dominated

Coldest Winter

- The winter of 2018-2019 was one of the coldest in the northern hemisphere.
- Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh reported 51 deaths triggered by snow avalanche in 2019.

Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary

Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary is located in North Goa District, Sanguentaluka near the town of Valpoi. Owing to the presence of Bengal Tigers, it can be declared as a tiger reserve under Project Tiger.

- It has been declared an International Bird Area because of the presence of the Nilgiri wood-pigeon, Malabar parakeet, Malabar grey hornbill, Grey-headed Bulbul, Rufous babbler, White-bellied blue-flycatcher and Crimson-backed sunbird.
- The sanctuary is a huge attraction for herpetologists(Study of amphibians and reptiles). since it contains a large variety of snakes including all of the 'big four' of Indian venomous snakes which are Indian krait, Russell's viper, Saw-scaled viper and Spectacled cobra.
- This sanctuary was formed in 1999. The formation of this sanctuary has made Goa the only state in India that has completely protected the Western Ghats that are located within its



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boundaries.

- The three highest peaks in Goa are situated in the hill ranges of the sanctuary. They are Sonsogod (1027 mts), TalavcheSada (812 mts) and Vageri (725 mts). Vageri means 'the abode of the tiger'.
- The Mhadei River, known downstream as the Mandovi River, the lifeline of the state of Goa, originates in Karnataka, passes through the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and meets the Arabian Sea at Panaji in Goa.
- The whole sanctuary acts as a catchment for the river. Most of the area has succumbed to the biotic pressure with agriculture and human interference replacing the rich natural vegetation of the past by cashew / kumeri cultivation.

