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Daily News Discussion (DND)

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1. Geography

1.1. ICAR receives King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award by FAO

- The international recognition was announced by the FAO, Rome on the eve of World Soil Day - 2020 in view of the ICAR's excellent contributions in "Soil Health Awareness" on the theme "Stop soil erosion, save our future" during the last year.
- The Institute organized a massive awareness campaign for preserving "SOIL - Our Mother Earth" to commemorate the World Soil Day including March-Past and distribution of promotional materials on soil health to the participants
- It organized several programmes with great fervour and enthusiasm for the school students, farming community and general public.

About King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award

- Launched in 2018
- The award, sponsored by the Kingdom of Thailand, is named after King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand for his lifelong commitment to raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management and rehabilitation for food security, poverty alleviation etc
- The Award acknowledges individuals or institutions that raise public awareness of soils by organising successful and influential World Soil Day celebrations.

About ICAR

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India. Formerly known as Imperial Council of Agricultural Research,
- It was established on 16 July 1929 as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860
 - ✓ It has played a major role in promoting excellence in higher education in agriculture.
 - ✓ It is engaged in cutting edge areas of science and technology development and its scientists are internationally acknowledged in their fields.

Soil degradation

- Soil degradation is the decline in soil condition caused by its improper use or poor management, usually for agricultural, industrial or urban purposes. It is a serious environmental problem. Soils are a fundamental natural resource, and are the basis for all terrestrial life. Avoiding soil degradation is crucial to our well-being.
- Ex Water erosion, wind erosion, salinity, loss of organic matter etc

2. History

2.1.PM to flag off march to Dandi today

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off a march from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on Friday to kick off celebrations of the 75th year of Independence, Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel said on Thursday.
- The Prime Minister would inaugurate cultural and digital initiatives as part of the celebrations and address the gathering at the Sabarmati Ashram as well, the Minister said.
- The Culture Ministry had announced last week that the celebrations would begin from Friday, March 12, marking the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha.
- It also marks 75 weeks till Independence Day 2022.

Dandi March

- The 1882 Salt Act gave the British a monopoly on the collection and manufacture of salt, levying a tax in the process. The violation of this act was a criminal offense. Even though salt was freely available to those living on the coast, Indians were forced to buy it from the colonial government
- Since the salt tax accounted for more than 8.2 % of the British Raj tax revenue and hurt the poorest Indians the most significantly. He reasoned that this would hurt the British even more significantly.
- Salt was chosen to symbolize the start of civil disobedience movement because salt was deemed as something on which each Indian had the basic right
- On March 12, 1930, Gandhiji set out from Sabarmati with 78 followers on a 241-mile march to the coastal town of Dandi on the Arabian Sea

3. Polity

3.1. Centre approves creation of PM Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister recently approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for the share of health from the proceeds of health and education cess levied under the Finance Act, 2007.

About Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi

- It is a non-lapsable reserve fund for health in the public account
- The proceeds of the share of health in the health and education cess will be credited into.
- The accruals into the PMSSN will be utilised for the flagship schemes of the health ministry such as Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, Health and Wellness Centres, National Health Mission, and Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana,
- It could also be utilised for emergency and disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies and any future programmes or schemes that target to achieve progress towards sustainable development goals and the targets set out in the National Health Policy, 2017.
- The administration and maintenance of the PMSSN are entrusted to the health ministry

Health and Education Cess

- In the budget speech 2018, the finance minister while announcing the ambitious Ayushman Bharat Scheme had mentioned the replacement of 3 % education cess by 4 % cess that was to be applied over health and education in the country.

Cess

- A cess imposed by the central government is a tax on tax, levied by the government for a specific purpose. Generally, cess is expected to be levied till the time the government gets enough money for that purpose.
- Article 270 of the Constitution allows cess to be excluded from the purview of the divisible pool of taxes that the Union government must share with the States.

Surcharge

- Surcharge is a charge on any tax, charged on the tax already paid. As the name suggests, surcharge is an additional charge or tax. The main surcharges are that on personal income tax (on high income slabs and on super rich) and on corporate income tax
- A surcharge is discussed under Article 270 and 271 of the Indian Constitution.
- Despite both are not shareable with state governments, surcharge can be kept with the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) and spent like any other taxes, the cess should be kept as a separate fund after allocating to CFI and can be spent only for a specific purpose.

4. Economy

4.1. How FPOs can help small and marginal farmers

About

- One of the reasons for agrarian distress is the declining average size of farm holdings.
- The average farm size declined from 2.3 hectares (ha) in 1970-71 to 1.08 ha in 2015-16.
- The share of small and marginal farmers increased from 70 per cent in 1980-81 to 86 per cent in 2015-16.
- FPO seems to be an important institutional mechanism to organise small and marginal farmers.

About FPO

- The concept of 'Farmer Producer Organizations, (FPO)' consists of collectivization of producers especially small and marginal farmers
- legal entity formed by primary producers, viz. farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen. PO is a generic name for an organization of producers of any produce, e.g., agricultural, non-farm products, artisan products, etc.
- It can be a production company, a cooperative society or any other legal form which provides for sharing of profits/benefits among the members
- Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.

NABARD Report (2017)

- Around 5,000 FPOs are operating in the country, which was formed under various initiatives of the Central Government (including Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium), State governments, NABARD, and other organizations.
- Of these, around 3,200 FPOs are registered as farmer producer companies and the remaining as cooperatives/societies, etc

Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

- The government has launched a new dedicated Central Sector Scheme titled with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs.

Additional information about FPO

- Since 2011, it has intensively promoted FPOs under the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), NABARD, state governments and NGOs.
- The membership of an FPO ranges from 100 to over 1,000 farmers. Most of these farmers have small holdings.
- The budget for 2018-19 announced supporting measures for FPOs including a five-year tax exemption
- The budget for 2019-20 talked of setting up 10,000 more FPOs in the next five years.

Case study (International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI))

Maharashtra

- Some of the FPOs have organically evolved (OFPOs) when farmers have taken the lead to adopt market-oriented practices, develop cost-effective solutions in production and marketing.

Bihar

- Almost all FPOs have been promoted (PFPOs).

Result

OFPO

- 98 per cent of the respondents for OFPOs report an increase in gross income while only 2 per cent indicate decline in the same.

PFPOs

- 64 per cent report an increase in gross income while 27 per cent report no change in income.

Non Members

- Only 32 per cent of the non-members indicate an increase in gross income.

Conclusion

- These results show that FPOs are doing better than non-FPO farmers
- Within FPOs, organically evolved FPOs are more beneficial than pushed or promoted FPOs

Challenges and solution

- Issues such as working capital, marketing, infrastructure have to be addressed while scaling up FPOs.
- Getting credit is the biggest problem. Banks must have structured products for lending to FPOs.
- These organisations lack professional management and, therefore, need capacity building.
- They have to be linked with input companies, technical service providers, marketing/processing companies, retailers etc. They need a lot of data on markets and prices and other information and competency in information technology.
- FPOs can be used to augment the size of the land by focusing on grouping contiguous tracts of land as far as possible – they should not be a mere grouping of individuals.
- Women farmers also can be encouraged to group cultivate for getting better returns. FPOs can also encourage consolidation of holdings.

4.2.Govt. owning bad bank is more capital efficient

- Amid confusing reports about the control of the proposed bad bank, a brokerage has called for government ownership, saying state-funding was more capital efficient apart from speeding up implementation and also lowering the credit costs for the banks.
- As of March 2020, the gross non-performing loans of banks stood at 2.8% or ₹2,89,500 crore, which is 1.3% of the GDP, according to the report.

- This would go up to 13.5% by this September, a two-decade high, given the impact of the pandemic on the companies and banks, according to the Reserve Bank of India

About Bad bank

- US-based Mellon Bank created the first bad bank in 1988, after which the concept has been implemented in other countries including Sweden, Finland etc
- Technically, a bad bank is an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) that takes over the bad loans of commercial banks, manages them and finally recovers the money over a period of time.
- The bad bank is not involved in lending and taking deposits, but helps commercial banks clean up their balance sheets and resolve bad loans.
- The takeover of bad loans is normally below the book value of the loan and the bad bank tries to recover as much as possible subsequently.

5. International Relations

5.1. PM inaugurates 'Maitri Setu' between India and Bangladesh

About Maitri Setu

- The bridge 'Maitri Setu' has been built over the Feni River which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura State and Bangladesh.
- The 1.9 Km long bridge joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
- The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd.

Significance of the bridge

- Tripura is set to become the 'Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 kms from Sabroom.
- It will help ease the movement of goods and passengers between the two countries provide new market opportunities for products of North-East states and assist the seamless movement of passengers to and from India and Bangladesh.
- The project is being taken up by the Land Ports Authority of India.

About Feni River

- Feni is a river in southeastern Bangladesh and Tripura.
- It is a trans-boundary river with an ongoing dispute about water rights.
- It originates in the South Tripura district and flows through Sabroom town and then enters Bangladesh.
- The question of sharing the waters of the river between India and Pakistan was first discussed in 1958.

Other Initiatives

- PM Modi also laid the foundation stone for setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom.

Significance

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5.2. US's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

- Ever since India formally signed up for the \$5.5 billion S-400 purchase in October 2018, it has been under the incipient threat of being penalised under the US's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

What is CAATSA?

- Enacted in 2017, it is a US federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia.
- Includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.
- The Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of the 12 listed sanctions on persons engaged in a "significant transaction" with Russian defence and intelligence sectors

Background of CAATSA

- The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act came against the backdrop of three events that would have serious implications regarding geopolitics. They are as follows:
 - ✓ Iran's Nuclear Missiles Program: The United States Government believed that any progress in Iran's nuclear missile program would further destabilize the Middle-East as Iran has repeatedly made threats against Israel
 - ✓ . The CAATSA gives authority to the President of the United States to impose sanctions against any party involved in the sale and transfer of military technology to Iran.
 - ✓ Curbing Russian influence: The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and allegations of interventions in the US polls of 2016 was the catalyst for the CAATSA against Russia.

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Curbing Russian influence:

- The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and allegations of interventions in the US polls of 2016 was the catalyst for the CAATSA against Russia.

North Korea and weapons of mass destruction:

- North Korea has a nuclear weapons military program

What sanctions will be imposed?

- prohibition on loans to the sanctioned person.
- prohibition of Export-Import bank assistance for exports to sanctioned persons.
- prohibition on procurement by United States Government to procure goods or services from the sanctioned person.
- denial of visas to persons closely associated with the sanctioned person

India's concern

- India to buy the S-400 Triumf long-range surface-to-air missile systems from Almaz-Antey Corporation of Russia in October 2018 and the delivery is expected to start in 2021
- The CAATSA contains 12 types of sanctions
- There are only two sanctions that may impact either India-Russia relations or India-US relations.
 - ✓) Prohibition of Banking transactions
 - ❖ This would mean difficulties for India in making payments in US Dollars to Russia for the purchase of the S-400 systems.
 - ✓ Export sanction
 - ❖ It will effectively bar India from buying any major defence equipment from the US, putting a stop to any Defence and Strategic Partnership between India and the US

Analysis

- This Act, which has neither international legitimacy nor sanction from the United Nations (UN), applies to all Russian military and defence-related entities.
- The Act, which also covers other Russian sectors like data processing, petroleum and crude oil, has so far been invoked against China, and more recently Turkey, for receiving two S-400 systems each, similar to the five ordered by India.
- CAATSA, however, does not incorporate provisions for sanctioning any country simply for ordering the S-400s; it embargoes them once system deliveries begin, going by the Chinese and Turkish instances
- Some analysts take this to indicate that the threat of CAATSA emanates principally over the IAF opting for the S-400 instead of rival systems like Lockheed Martin's Patriot Advanced Capability PAC-3 or the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system,
- India's majority, over 65%, of Indian military platforms in all three services, are of Russian origin.

Way Forward

- The Acts Section 231 states that a sanctions waiver can be granted if the concerned country –
- Takes steps to reduce its inventory of major defence equipment and advanced conventional weapons produced by the defence sector of the Russian Federation...over a specified period'
- A follow-on clause requires that particular country to cooperate with the US on other security matters critical to its interests.

India qualifies on both counts

- According to SIPRI, India's share of Russian materiel buys had declined from 70% in 2010-2014 to 58% in 2014-2018 while conversely
- Between 2008-2017 Indian military platforms and defence kit procurements from the US had increased a whopping 557%.

- Additionally, India had substantially increased defence procurements from the US's strategic partners France and Israel.

5.3.China overhauls Hong Kong's poll system

- China on Thursday passed sweeping changes for Hong Kong's electoral system that will give Beijing-appointed politicians a greater say in running the Special Administration Region (SAR), marking the biggest change since the handover in 1997.
- Currently, only half of the 70 members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) are directly elected and the rest are nominated.
- With this change, the number of LegCo members will be increased to 90, with the additional members also nominated, thereby reducing the share of elected representatives.

One Country Two Systems

- the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions, both former colonies, can have different economic and political systems from that of mainland China, while being part of the People's Republic of China.

Sino-British Joint Declaration

- On December 19, 1984, signed between China and the U.K. which set the terms for the autonomy and the legal, economic and governmental systems for Hong Kong post 1997.

The Joint Declaration on the Question of Macau

- Similarly, on March 26, 1987, signed between China and Portugal in which China made similar promises for the region of Macau after it was handed over to Beijing.

One Country Two Systems

- Both regions became Special Administrative Regions of China. The regions would have their own currencies, economic and legal systems, but defence and diplomacy would be decided by Beijing.
- Their mini-Constitutions would remain valid for 50 years – till 2047 for Hong Kong and 2049 for Macau.

China has passed a wide-ranging new security law for Hong Kong

- It will make changes in the Basic Law, the mini-constitution which defines ties between Hong Kong and Beijing (China's capital).

Basic Law

- It allows Hong Kong to enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication, barring matters of defence and foreign affairs.
- Under Article 23 of the Basic Law, Hong Kong has to enact a national security law
- Article 23 aims at preserving national security but it will also allow China's national security organs to formally operate and set up institutions in Hong Kong.
- Basic law makes it clear that only Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) can make and repeal laws.

- However, Beijing can bypass LegCo if it chooses to and make the national security law applicable to Hong Kong by inserting this legislation in Annex III of the Basic Law.

The new law's key provisions include that

- Crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces are punishable by a maximum sentence of life in prison
- Damaging public transport facilities can be considered terrorism
- Companies can be fined if convicted under the law
- Beijing will establish a new security office in Hong Kong, with its own law enforcement personnel - neither of which would come under the local authority's jurisdiction
- This office can send some cases to be tried in mainland China - but Beijing has said it will only have that power over a "tiny number" of cases

Concern

- It is clear that the law will have a severe impact on freedom of expression, if not personal security, on the people of Hong Kong

Current affairs Worksheet (12 March 2021)

Factual sheet for Quick revision

Topic	Description	Update
IR	<p>Maitri setu</p> <p>States sharing border with Bangladesh & Myanmar</p> <p>CAATSA</p> <p>One country two system</p> <p>Two state solution</p>	
Geog	<p>King Bhumibol award</p> <p>Soil degradation</p> <p>conservation</p> <p>ICAR</p>	
Economy	<p>FPO- govt effort</p> <p>Bad bank</p> <p>Farmers classification</p>	
History	<p>Dandi March</p> <p>Gandhi's Ashram and News paper</p>	
Polity	<p>PM Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi</p>	