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# 2-Minute Series

*A compilation of foundational topics prerequisite for Civil Services*

*For the 4th Week*

*of*

# June 2021

*(21st June to 26th June)*

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# 1. Geography

## 1.1. National Rail Plan 2030

- Indian Railways have prepared a National Rail Plan (NRP) for India – 2030.
- The Plan is to create a ‘future ready’ Railway system by 2030.
- The main features of the National Rail Plan are:-
  - ✓ Formulate strategies based on both operational capacities and commercial policy initiatives to increase modal share of the Railways in freight to 45%.
  - ✓ Reduce transit time of freight substantially by increasing average speed of freight trains to 50Kmph.
  - ✓ As part of the National Rail Plan, Vision 2024 has been launched for accelerated implementation of certain critical projects by 2024 such as 100% electrification, multi-tracking of congested routes, upgradation of speed to 160 kmph on Delhi-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai routes, upgradation of speed to 130 kmph on all other Golden Quadrilateral-Golden Diagonal (GQ/GD) routes and elimination of all Level Crossings on all GQ/GD route.
  - ✓ Identify new Dedicated Freight Corridors.
  - ✓ Identify new High Speed Rail Corridors.
  - ✓ Assess rolling stock requirement for passenger traffic as well as wagon requirement for freight.
  - ✓ Assess Locomotive requirement to meet twin objectives of 100% electrification (Green Energy) and increasing freight modal share.
  - ✓ Assess the total investment in capital that would be required along with a periodical break up.
  - ✓ Sustained involvement of the Private Sector in areas like operations and ownership of rolling stock, development of freight and passenger terminals, development/operations of track infrastructure etc.
- The draft plan has been put up in the public domain (The Indian Railways website) and is also being circulated amongst stakeholders for comments/ remarks.

### Railways

- NITI Aayog

### Railways - Constraints

- Congested networks
- Organizational structure
- Internal generation of resources
- Safety and poor quality of service delivery
- Efficiency of terminals
- Economies of scale

## Railways – Way Forward

- Better utilization of existing infrastructure to address congestion.
- Ease organizational rigidity through structural reforms.
- Rationalize fare structures and subsidies, and monetize assets to generate revenues.
- Enhance safety of trains to reduce accidents and modernize stations
- Enhance the ease of doing business
- Set up an independent regulator for the Indian Railways

## 2. History

### 2.1. Vaisheshika School of Indian Philosophy

- Founder - Kanada Kashyapa Source - Vaishesika Sutra
- In its early stages, the Vaiśeṣika was an independent philosophy with its own metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, and soteriology.
- Over time, the Vaiśeṣika system became similar in its philosophical procedures, ethical conclusions and soteriology to the Nyāya school of Hinduism, but retained its difference in epistemology and metaphysics.
- The epistemology of Vaiśeṣika school of Hinduism, like Buddhism, accepted only two reliable means to knowledge: perception and inference.
- Vaisheshika school is known for its insights in naturalism. It is a form of atomism in natural philosophy.
- It postulated that all objects in the physical universe are reducible to paramāṇu (atoms), and one's experiences are derived from the interplay of substance (a function of atoms, their number and their spatial arrangements), quality, activity, commonness, particularity and inherence.
- Everything was composed of atoms, qualities emerged from aggregates of atoms, but the aggregation and nature of these atoms was predetermined by cosmic forces.
- Ajivika metaphysics included a theory of atoms which was later adapted in Vaiśeṣika school.
- According to Vaiśeṣika school, knowledge and liberation were achievable by a complete understanding of the world of experience.
- Vaisheshika espouses a form of atomism, that the reality is composed of five substances (examples are earth, water, air, fire, and space).
- Each of these five are of two types, paramāṇu and composite. A paramāṇu is that which is indestructible, indivisible, and has a special kind of dimension, called "small" (aṇu). A composite is that which is divisible into paramāṇu.
- Parama means "most distant, remotest, extreme, last" and aṇu means "atom, very small particle", hence paramāṇu is essentially "the most distant or last small (i.e. smallest) particle".
- According to Vaishesika School, All things that exist, that can be recognized are named as padarthas - and these can be categorised in to 6 categories -
  - ✓ Dravya (substance)
  - ✓ Guna (Quality)
  - ✓ Karma (Activity)
  - ✓ Samanya (Generality)
  - ✓ Visesa (Particularity)
  - ✓ Samavaya (inherence)



- The first three categories are defined as artha (which can be perceived) and they have real objective existence.
- The last three categories are defined as budhyapekṣam (product of intellectual discrimination) and they are logical categories.
- Later Vaiśeṣikas added one more category abhava (non-existence)

### **Views on God -**

- All physical things are a combination of the atoms of earth, water, fire, and air.
- Inactive and motionless in themselves, the atoms are put into motion by God's will, through the unseen forces of moral merit and demerit.

## 3. Polity & Governance

### 3.1. Challenge to Election Petition

- Context: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee filed an election petition in the Calcutta High Court challenging the Assembly election result of Nandigram constituency, where she had contested and lost to Suvendu Adhikari.

#### What is an election petition?

- The Election Commission's role ends with the declaration of results, that is once the Returning Officer has signed the final result sheet (Form 20). After that, an election petition is the only legal remedy available to a voter or a candidate who believes there has been malpractice in an election.
- Such a person can challenge the result through an election petition submitted to the High Court of the state in which the constituency is located. Such a petition has to be filed within 45 days from the date of the poll results; nothing is entertained by courts after that.
- Although the Representative of the People Act of 1951 suggests that the High Court should try to conclude the trial within six months, it usually drags on for much longer.

#### On what grounds can an election petition be filed?

- Under Section 100 of the RP Act, an election petition can be filed on the grounds that:
  - ✓ On the day of the election, the winning candidate was not qualified to contest.
  - ✓ The winning candidate, his poll agent or any other person with the consent of the winning candidate has indulged in a corrupt practice. Section 123 of the RP Act has a detailed list of what amounts to corrupt practice, including bribery, use of force or coercion, appeal to vote or refrain from voting on grounds of religion, race, community, and language.
  - ✓ Improper acceptance of the nomination of the winning candidate or improper rejection of a nomination.
  - ✓ Malpractice in the counting process, which includes improper reception, refusal or rejection of any vote, or the reception of any vote which is void.
  - ✓ Non-compliance with the provisions of the Constitution or the RP Act or any rules or orders made under the RP Act.

#### What happens if the court finds that a contention of malpractice is correct?

- Under Section 84 of the RP Act, the petitioner may ask that the results of all or the winning candidates may be declared void. In addition to that, the petitioner may also ask the court to declare her (in case the petition is filed by a candidate) or any other candidate as the winner or duly elected.
- So the verdict on an election petition, if found in favour of the petitioner, may result in a fresh election or the court announcing a new winner.
- There are many examples, the most famous being the Allahabad High Court verdict of 1975 which set aside Indira Gandhi's election from Rae Bareilly constituency, four years earlier, on grounds of corrupt practice. The election petition was filed by her nearest rival Raj Narain who had lost by over one lakh votes.



- The High Court found that Indira Gandhi's election agent Yashpal Kapur, the District Magistrate of Rae Bareli, the Superintendent of Police of Rae Bareli and the Home Secretary of Uttar Pradesh government helped in the arrangements for her election tour on February 1 and February 25, 1971. This amounted to a corrupt practice under Section 123 (7) of the RP Act.

## 4. Environment

### 4.1. Great Barrier Reef 'In danger'

#### Introduction

- The United Nations has recommended that the Great Barrier Reef be placed on a list of World Heritage sites that are “in danger,” prompting a fierce reaction from the Australian government, which defended its management of one of the country’s top tourist destinations.
- The recommendation, made in a report by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, describes the long-term outlook for the natural wonder as having “deteriorated from poor to very poor” in the past several years.
- Despite commitments and progress under a long-term sustainability plan known as Reef 2050, the Great Barrier Reef continues to deteriorate, according to the report, and has suffered significant coral bleaching over the past five years.
- World heritage sites are global icons and “in danger” listings are usually recommended after effects from armed conflict and war, pollution, poaching and uncontrolled urbanisation.
- Placement on the “in-danger list” is not considered a sanction. Some nations have their sites added to gain international attention and help to save them.
- If the World Heritage Committee followed the recommendation, experts said it would be the first time a natural world heritage site has been placed on the “in danger” list mainly because of impacts from the climate crisis.
- Global heating caused by fossil fuel burning has driven ocean temperatures higher, leading to three mass bleaching events on the 2,300km reef since the last time it was assessed by the committee in 2015.

#### Great Barrier Reef

- The Great Barrier Reef is located just off the coast of Queensland, Australia.

#### Timeline

Ecological timeline of the Great Barrier Reef

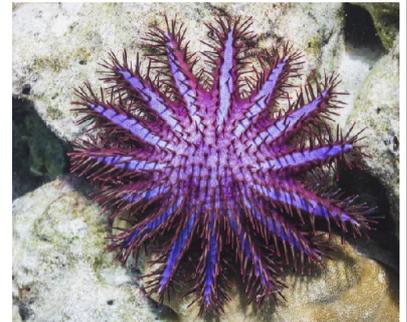
- **February 2015**  
Australia lobbies to prevent the Great Barrier Reef from being placed on Unesco's 'in danger' list
- **July 2015**  
Unesco does not list the reef as 'in danger', but warns it must show 'significant progress' by 2016
- **May 2016**  
Mass coral bleaching occurs over a third of the reef
- **April 2017**  
Aerial surveys reveal a second mass bleaching event has devastated two-thirds of the reef
- **21 May 2018**  
Government awards \$444m grant to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to protect the reef
- **April 2020**  
Third mass bleaching event occurs, destroying a quarter of the reef
- **August 2021**  
Marine Park Authority report declares the outlook for the reef has deteriorated to 'very poor'
- **June 2021**  
Unesco recommends Great Barrier Reef be listed as 'in danger'; Australian government says it will 'strongly oppose' the listing



- It is actually a system of separate reefs that can all be found in the Coral Sea and as a whole make up the large habitat.
- The Great Barrier Reef has a collection of approximately 2900 individual reefs and 900 islands.
- The Great Barrier Reef is the largest reef system in the world. It is so big it can be seen from space.
- It spreads across the floor of the Coral Sea for approximately 2600km.
- At some points along the Australian Coast the reef is 65km wide.
- The Great Barrier Reef lies close to the shore in some locations (the closest being 15 km away from shore), while other sections may not begin until as far as 150km away from shore.

### Great Barrier Reef - Threats

- Ocean Acidity – Limestone is the building block of coral reefs and a very basic substance, so when it dissolves slowly it lowers the acidity of the water around a coral reef.
- With the rising acidity of the world's oceans more limestone is dissolving to help keep the pH levels of the oceans balanced.
- This leads to the coral reefs being damaged and is one of the environmental threats to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.
- Crown-of-Thorns Starfish – This particular species of starfish is an invasive species in the Great Barrier Reef and can cause a lot of damage because it feasts on coral polyps.
- Rising Ocean Temperatures – Due to climate change the ocean temperatures are rising,
- especially surface water temperatures like those surrounding the Great Barrier Reef. Unfortunately even small shifts in temperature can cause coral bleaching.
- Rising ocean temperatures are considered one of the greatest threats to the Great Barrier Reef because of the extreme nature of climate change.
- Australia's Great Barrier Reef has lost more than half of its corals since 1995 due to warmer seas driven by climate change,
- Tourism – The amount of tourists that visit each year is approximately 2 million.
- While this is a great way to boost economy and educate people on the natural wonders of the coral reef, it can be detrimental to the health of the reef if tourism is not carefully monitored.
- Controls must be in place to prevent humans from walking on the coral, breaking off pieces of the reef as souvenirs, dropping anchors on the reefs and grounding boats on them, and dragging scuba gear across the coral.



## 5. International Relation

### 5.1. Cornwall Consensus

#### G7

- The Group of 7 (G7) is an informal group of seven countries – the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom, the heads of which hold an annual summit with and other invitees.
- The G7 draws its roots from a meeting between the current G7 members, excluding Canada, that took place in 1975.
- After this first summit, the countries agreed to meet annually and a year later, Canada was invited into the group which marked the official formation of the G7 as we know it.



- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries in turn, each year.
- The country holding the presidency is responsible for organising and hosting the meeting.
- The UK holds the G7 presidency for 2021 and has organised the conference at the Carbis Bay Hotel in Cornwall.
- This year, India, South Korea and Australia have been invited to attend the G7 summit as participating guests.

#### Agenda

- The G7 summit provides a forum for member countries to discuss shared values and concerns.
- While it initially focused on international economic policy, in the 1980s, the G7 extended its mandate to include issues related to foreign policy and security as well.

- In recent years, G7 leaders have met to formulate common responses to challenges encompassing counterterrorism, development, education, health, human rights and climate change.

## Washington Consensus

- The Washington Consensus is a set of ten economic policy prescriptions considered to constitute the "standard" reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington, D.C.-based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and United States Department of the Treasury.
- The prescriptions encompassed free-market promoting policies in such areas as macroeconomic stabilization, economic opening with respect to both trade and investment, and the expansion of market forces within the domestic economy.
- Three decades ago, the British economist John Williamson coined the phrase "Washington consensus" to describe a collection of free-market, pro-globalisation ideas that American leaders (among others) were promoting around the world.
- Third World countries were affected by these woes. However, perhaps the most significant victim of the Washington Consensus was "post-Soviet" Russia in the 1990s. As early as the beginning of the 2000s, this concept was virtually abandoned by its authors.
- Meanwhile, the process of China's transformation into a new global power (previously predicted only by experts) in the early 2000s should also come to the political surface, that is, to the public eye. Not only because of its own impressive economic achievements, but also because of the increasing scale of economic aid to the same Third World countries.

## The "Cornwall consensus"

- This is the title of an advisory memo circulated ahead of the G7 leaders meeting in Cornwall which is written by a committee of academics and policymakers from each of the seven countries, it sets out an "ambitious agenda to build forward better from the pandemic".

## Outcomes

- G7 agreed in principle upon global tax reforms.
  - ✓ The agreement covers two pillars: the first requiring MNCs to pay taxes in countries where they operate and not just where they have their headquarters; and the second pillar commits to a global minimum corporate tax of at least 15 percent on a country-by-country basis.
  - ✓ This proposal will be put forth for discussion in the G20 meeting in Venice in July, and while the details of the agreement would be key, a broader assessment suggests that this could boost tax revenues significantly across major economies, including in India.
- Build Back Better World: G7 partners agreed to launch the bold new global infrastructure initiative Build Back Better World (B3W), a values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership led by major democracies to help narrow the US\$40+ trillion infrastructure need in the developing world, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Through B3W, the G7 and other like-minded partners will coordinate in mobilizing private-sector capital in four areas of focus –climate, health and health security, digital technology, and gender equity and equality—with catalytic investments from respective development finance institutions.

- Vaccines

- ✓ The G7 pledged over the next 12 months to secure a further 1 bn vaccine doses either through donating surplus supplies or providing further finance to Covax, the UN-backed scheme charged with distributing vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.
- ✓ The main new pledges came from the US, UK and Germany.
- ✓ The communique also set out plans to reduce road blocks to production in Africa and on the controversial issue of enforced temporary waivers of patents said they will support manufacturing in low income countries.
- ✓ They said they would engage constructively on the issue of intellectual property waivers in discussions at the World Trade Organization.

- China

- ✓ The G7 nations have rallied against China and called them out on human rights violations and trade issues, pinching at some of their most sensitive affairs.
- ✓ Apart from this, the united front has also demanded a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong and a peaceful resolution of cross- Strait issues along with a full investigation of the origins of the coronavirus in the country.
- ✓ In response, China has asserted that the allegations are baseless, and instead accused the G7 of “political manipulation”.

- Climate and environment:

- ✓ Recommitment to the Paris Agreement
- ✓ Zero by 50 : At the Summit, the G7 leaders collectively pledged to increase their carbon emission reduction targets. The new goal is to collectively cut emissions by half by 2030 based on 2010 levels.
- ✓ Catalyse technology towards net zero: It has been made mandatory for big businesses to disclose the climate impacts of their operations by 2022; to protect 30% of their country’s land and sea by 2030, in line with scientific advice; and to stop funding coal generation around the world by year’s end, an important step to phase out the world’s dirtiest fossil fuel.

- ✓ Cold on coal

- ❖ The G7 acknowledged the impact of coal on the environment and its harmful contributions to global carbon emissions.
- ❖ To this end, the leaders agreed towards a faster phasing away of coal plants. As a more immediate measure, by the end of 2021, their governments will end direct support for coal plants