

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (MAY 28, 2022)

written by Lukmaan IAS

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

1. DROP IN LEARNING OUTCOMES ACROSS GRADES, SUBJECTS, FINDS EDUCATION MINISTRY SURVEY

THE CONTEXT: The National Achievement Survey, conducted in November last year, found that the national average of scores in all subjects evaluated fell from the last iteration of the survey in 2017, and that learning outcomes get progressively worse in higher grades.

THE EXPLANATION:

- The performances of students in schools from across the country have suffered in the five years since 2017, a survey by the Ministry of Education has found.
- The National Achievement Survey (NAS) was conducted by the Ministry in November last year and covered 34 lakh students from 1.18 lakh schools in 720 districts across states and Union Territories (UTs) in the country.
- The survey tested students from classes 3, 5, 8 and 10 and covered a variety of subjects, from math to environmental and social science, with the specific concepts tested being tweaked for students from each grade.
- Importantly, a dip in educational outcomes was observed across grades and subjects with national average scores dropping by nine percentage points since the last time

the survey was conducted, in 2017. Moreover, all but two states – Punjab and Haryana – saw poorer outcomes than in the last survey, the Indian Express reported.

- “The objective of NAS 2021 is to evaluate children’s progress and learning competencies as an indicator of the efficiency of the education system, so as to take appropriate steps for remedial actions at different levels,” the newspaper quoted an official Ministry statement as saying.

COVID and the digital divide

- A major driver of disruption in the education sector was the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. Not only were learning outcomes in general disturbed by lock downs and school closures, but the migration to the online mode of learning deepened the existing digital divide among students from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- The NAS, 2021 found that 24% of students surveyed did not have access to digital devices in their homes and 38% claimed that they had difficulty carrying out learning activities at home during the pandemic.
- Importantly, a whopping 80% of students said that they learnt better at school, where they could solicit the help of their peers.

THE POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

2. DIGITIZATION WILL ENSURE SPEEDY, EFFICIENT DELIVERY OF JUSTICE

THE CONTEXT: Digitization of court records, e-filing of cases and their virtual hearing, live streaming of court proceedings are particularly important.

THE EXPLANATION:

- The Indian judiciary has increasingly started using technology and the change is reflected in the legal profession in general as well. Some significant developments had taken place before the Covid –19 crisis in 2020, with the digitization of judicial records and establishing of e-courts. Hence, it is imperative that the use of digital technology be discussed to better utilize its potential, particularly in terms of digitization of court records, e-filing of cases and their virtual hearing, live streaming of court proceedings.
- In India, e-governance in the field of administration of justice began in the late 1990s, but it accelerated after the enactment of the Information and Technology Act, 2000. As the 21st century began, the focus was on digitizing the court's records and establishing e-courts across the country. In the year of 2006, e-courts were launched as a part of the National e-Governance Plan (NEGP).
- The time consumed in summoning records from the lower courts to the appellate courts is one of the major factors causing delays in cases. With digitization, it will take much less time for the lower courts to transmit the records as and when called for. It has also been observed that cases are adjourned simply because affidavits filed several years ago were not restored with the record or were not traceable.
- Once the documents are digitized and e-filed by counsels, at least the cases would not get adjourned by the courts on this account.
- Before the pandemic, virtual hearings were used only in a limited manner; for example, in criminal cases where it was not possible to produce the accused physically before the court or while extending the remand of the accused. Not every case can be disposed of virtually,

however.

- Cases related to matrimonial issues and domestic violence, bounced cheques, motor accident compensation referred to mediation centres and lokadalats could be included in the list of cases fit for disposal through the virtual hearing.
- Internet connectivity issues and the need for a well-equipped space where lawyers can conduct their cases are some of the major problems requiring attention. Political will and the support of judges and lawyers are also necessary. Judges, court staff and lawyers are not well-versed with digital technology and its benefits. The need of the hour is for them to be made aware of these and receive adequate training.
- Virtual hearings cannot be a substitute for physical court hearings in all cases. However, in appropriate cases and certain categories of cases as identified by the court administration in consultation with the members of the Bar, virtual hearing should be made mandatory.

3. WHAT ARE COMMUNITY FOREST RIGHTS, WHY DO THEY MATTER?

THE CONTEXT: The Chhattisgarh government has become only the second state in the country to recognize Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights of a village inside a national park. The CFR rights of tribals living in Gudiyapadar, a hamlet inside the Kanger Ghati National Park in Bastar district.

THE EXPLANATION:

- The community forest resource area is the common forest land that has been traditionally protected and conserved for sustainable use by a particular community. The community uses it to access resources available within the traditional and customary boundary of the village,

and for seasonal use of landscape in case of pastoralist communities.

- Each CFR area has a customary boundary with identifiable landmarks recognized by the community and its neighboring villages. It may include forest of any category – revenue forest, classified & unclassified forest, deemed forest, DLC land, reserve forest, protected forest, sanctuary, and national parks etc.
- The Community Forest Resource rights under Section 3(1)(i) of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (commonly referred to as the Forest Rights Act or the FRA) provide for recognition of the right to “protect, regenerate or conserve or manage” the community forest resource.
- These rights allow the community to formulate rules for forest use by itself and others and thereby discharge its responsibilities under Section 5 of the FRA.
- CFR rights, along with Community Rights (CRs) under Sections 3(1)(b) and 3(1)(c), which include nistar rights and rights over non-timber forest products, ensure sustainable livelihoods of the community.
- These rights give the authority to the Gram Sabha to adopt local traditional practices of forest conservation and management within the community forest resource boundary.
- Aimed at undoing the “historic injustice” meted out to forest-dependent communities due to curtailment of their customary rights over forests, the FRA came into force in 2008.
- It is important as it recognises the community’s right to use, manage and conserve forest resources, and to legally hold forest land that these communities have used for cultivation and residence.
- It also underlines the integral role that forest dwellers play in sustainability of forests and in conservation of biodiversity.

- It is of greater significance inside protected forests like national parks, sanctuaries and tiger reserves as traditional dwellers then become a part of management of the protected forests using their traditional wisdom.

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

4. THE WHAT, HOW AND WHY OF THE INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

THE CONTEXT: On May 23, US President Joe Biden officially launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) in Tokyo. Conceived and led by the United States, the IPEF has 13 founding members, including Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

THE EXPLANATION:

- During the East Asia Summit in October 2021, President Biden announced plans to launch a US-led IPEF. Subsequently, US officials conducted exploratory discussions with their traditional allies in the region. In February 2022, an Indo-Pacific strategy was revealed, which mentioned the formal launch of the IPEF in early 2022.
- Not surprisingly, the United States has not invited China to join the IPEF despite China belonging to the Indo-Pacific region and holding significant regional economic influence. China has also not shown any interest in joining this framework, interpreting Indo-Pacific initiatives as a US-led containment strategy directed against it. Although Taiwan is eager to join the IPEF, the US would only pursue a bilateral engagement with it. Three ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) are also not part of the IPEF.



- With the shift of the centre of gravity from the Atlantic to Asia, the new concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' has entered the geopolitical discourse, replacing the hitherto dominant 'Asia-Pacific' construct, even though its geographic boundaries are not well defined.
- Based on maritime geography, the Indo-Pacific refers to a contiguous zone encompassing the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The geographic boundaries of the Indo-Pacific could stretch from East Africa to the west coast of the US and encompass a large number of countries at varying stages of development, with distinct policy agendas and divergent interests.
- Bringing together highly heterogeneous countries with high-standard commitments on the digital economy, green infrastructure, clean energy, and social and environmental standards under the rubric of IPEF is a herculean effort.
- The term 'Indo-Pacific' started to be discussed in strategic circles about a decade ago, but has rapidly gained importance in recent years. The economic rise of India and the massive increase in maritime trade passing through the Indian Ocean have helped make the Indo-Pacific a geopolitical and geo economic construct. Currently, the Indo-Pacific is the most contested maritime zone in the world because of the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China and the security interests of other key players in the region.
- In the economic realm, the Indo-Pacific is one of the world's most dynamic regions. The region accounts for more than 60% of the global GDP, and almost 50% of the

global merchandise trade passes through its waters.

- The region includes the world's four big economies: the USA, China, Japan, and India. With the engine of global economic growth shifting eastwards, the Indo-Pacific region will gain greater importance in coming years.
- Since the launch of the "Pivot to Asia" strategy (the re-balancing towards Asia-Pacific) by the Obama administration in 2011, the US has intensified its engagement with the wider Asia-Pacific region to advance its economic and geopolitical interests. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was the centre piece of Obama's strategic pivot to Asia and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor was also part of this strategy.
- In their foreign policy calculations, successive US administrations have given greater prominence to the Indo-Pacific region, pushing to connect the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single maritime entity, which also enables India to play a more proactive role in the region.

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5. INDIA LIKELY TO GET ITS FIRST SEMI-HIGH SPEED FREIGHT TRAIN BY THIS DECEMBER

THE CONTEXT: To tap the growing freight sector, the Railways is aiming to introduce the country's first semi-high speed freight train by December 2022.

THE EXPLANATION:

- Based on the Vande Bharat platform, the 16-coach 'Gati Shakti' train will be able to run at 160 km/hour and will be manufactured at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF)

in Chennai.

- With these trains, the Railways plans to target the e-commerce and courier parcel segment. Quoting data from IBEF, an ICF official added that with the turnover of \$50 billion in 2020, India had become the 8th largest market for e-commerce.
- “India’s ecommerce market is expected to reach \$111 billion by 2024 and \$200 billion by 2026 and expected to reach \$350 billion by 2030,” the official said, adding that the Railways planned to capture the small size parcel shipments by running dedicated high speed freight trains.
- Additionally, each train would have two refrigerated wagons – the first and last cars, to ferry perishable items such as fruits and vegetables.
- The Railways is aiming to increase its share in freight transportation from the present 27% to 45% by 2030 through better infrastructure and business development plans, according to the National Rail Plan.

THE MISCELLANEOUS

6. NEW ARUNACHAL MONKEY NAMED AFTER SELA PASS

THE CONTEXT: A new species of old-world monkey recorded from Arunachal Pradesh has been named after a strategic mountain pass at 13,700 ft above sea level.

THE EXPLANATION:

- Sela macaque (*Macacaselai*), the new-to-science primate was identified and analysed by a team of experts from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and the University of Calcutta. Their study has been published in the latest edition of *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*.



- Phylogenetics relate to the evolutionary development and diversification of a species or group of organisms.
- The phylogenetic analysis revealed that the Sela macaque was geographically separated from the Arunachal macaque (*Macaca munzala*) of Tawang district by Sela.
- This mountain pass acted as a barrier by restricting the migration of individuals of these two species for approximately two million years.
- Sela is situated between Dirang and Tawang towns in western Arunachal Pradesh.
- The new macaque species in western and central Arunachal Pradesh while exploring the Arunachal macaque's wild population for genetic insights. It was found to be genetically different from the other species of monkeys reported from this region," ZSI's Mukesh Thakur.

Major cause for crop loss

- The study describes the Sela macaque as genetically closer to the Arunachal macaque. The two have some similar physical characteristics such as heavy-build shape and long dorsal body hair. Both species have troops that either avoid proximity to humans or are used to human presence.
- The zoologists identified some distinct morphological traits to differentiate the two species. While the Sela macaque has a pale face and brown coat, the Arunachal

macaque has a dark face and dark brown coat.

- According to the villagers, the Sela macaque is a major cause of crop loss in the West Kameng district of the State.
- The study says the Sela macaque has a tail longer than the Tibetan macaque, Assamese macaque, Arunachal macaque and the white-cheeked macaque but shorter than the bonnet macaque and toque macaque.
- Sela macaque belongs to the sinica species-group of Macaca, but it differs from all other members of this group through attributes such as brown collar hair and muzzle, thick brown hair around the neck and the absence of chin whiskers.

THE PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

QUESTION FOR 28TH MAY 2022

Q1. Sela pass, sometimes seen in news, is located in

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Himachal Pradesh
- c) Jammu & Kashmir
- d) Sikkim

ANSWER FOR THE 27th MAY

Answer: C

Explanation:

The Emissions Gap Report 2021 shows that new national climate

pledges combined with other mitigation measures put the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.7°C by the end of the century. That is well above the goals of the Paris climate agreement and would lead to catastrophic changes in the Earth's climate. To keep global warming below 1.5°C this century, the aspirational goal of the Paris Agreement, the world needs to halve annual greenhouse gas emissions in the next eight years. It is published by **the United Nations Environment Programme**.