Social Justice

National Girl Child Day

Syllabus: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

In News

- The Women & Child Development Ministry celebrated the National Girl Child Day (NGCD) on **24th January** in New Delhi. The celebrations also marked the **anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme**.

- This year's theme of NGCD is "**Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow**" and was celebrated with the **objective of generating awareness on the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and creating a positive environment around valuing the girl child**.

- A booklet on Innovations under BBBP was also released on the occasion. The Ministry has compiled 38 innovative activities from districts across the country to set an example for other districts. These interventions have been categorized according to five themes, which are Survival, Protection, Education, Participation and Valuing Girls.

- The occasion was also marked by felicitation of the 5 States and 25 Districts under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme for their exemplary performance in three categories - Effective Community Engagement, Enforcement of Pre Conception & Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PC&PNDT Act) and Enabling Girl Child Education.

Objectives of National Girl Child Day

It is celebrated to increase the consciousness of the people and offer new opportunities to the girl child in the society.

- To remove all the inequalities faced by the girl child.

- To ensure that girls are accorded the human rights they deserve.

- To work against the diminishing child sex ratio in the country and change people's mind around it.

- To address issues associated to their health, respect, education and nutrition.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme

- It was **launched in 2015** and upon observing the improving trend of sex ratio at birth (SRB) in 161 implementing districts it was **launched across the country** covering all the 640 districts **in 2018**.

- It is **a Central Sector Scheme** with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DM's account for smooth operation of the Scheme. It is a **tri-**

ministerial effort of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

- The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

Indian Forest and Tribal Service

Syllabus: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

In News

- The Union government has proposed **renaming of the Indian Forest Servie as Indian Forest and Tribal Service**. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has initiated an inter-ministerial consultation note to rename the service and also train its cadre to be more receptive towards tribals and forest dwellers.

- The move follows a **directive from the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** to this effect. NCST concluded at a full commission meeting that the Indian Forest Service had long been at loggerheads with tribals, with whom IFS cadre is in close contact.

- The draft recommendation states that **although there are constitutional provisions for the upliftment of Scheduled Tribes in the country, there is no dedicated service to ensure this**.

- Presently, **tribal development activities are being looked after by** officers drawn from the State Civil Services, who work mostly under **Tribal Development Department**. At the higher level of government, there is no dedicated service for the development of STs in the country.

- As a result, the Tribal Ministry has no say in the management of forests, while the Environment Ministry — which is the cadre-controlling ministry for IFS officers — is trying to conserve forests without taking tribals into account

- This has led to an approach where the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is trying to conserve the forests with or without tribals whereas the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is aiming at the welfare of tribals without having much say on the management of forests as the primary resource of tribals

- Forest Service officials have always been the first point of government contact for tribals. But there is **little awareness among the service officials on the different problems faced by the tribals**. In fact, tribals often complain of harassment like not being allowed to carry out their headloads of minor forest produce

- The step **will infuse a unity of purpose** by creating a set of officials both at the centre and state levels who are singularly responsible and accountable to the State Governments as well as Government of India for development of tribals as well as conservation of forests.

Project ReWeave

Syllabus: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

In News

- Microsoft India has announced the launch of a **new e-commerce platform for handloom weavers under its Project ReWeave**, as part of its philanthropic initiative.

- The e-commerce platform **would help connect artisans to the buyers directly enabling them to expand to newer customers and markets**. It will also help weavers to increase their income and earn a sustainable livelihood, while also reviving forgotten Indian art.

- The Indian handloom industry is the second-largest employment provider for the rural population in India, with almost 43 lakh weavers. Project ReWeave also aims to help weavers with working capital support through non-profit organisations.

- This also is a practical solution to motivate the younger generation of weavers to continue with their traditions and not divert into other professions.

- The website hosts signature collections created by weaver communities and showcases traditional designs and products created from natural dyes.

- Microsoft in association with the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) has also curated a special curriculum in **'CAD and Color for Handloom Weaving'** to provide digital training in handloom design. At a ceremony hosted at NIFT, the first batch of 100 handloom weavers was awarded certificates for successful design course completion

- Digital technology is changing the lives of Indians across every section of society. Working with global technology leaders such as Microsoft has enabled to bring technology to the doorstep of the large weaver communities.

- With the introduction of the new e-commerce platform, digital empowerment centres and the new design curriculum, weavers will be able to build on the rich handloom heritage of India.

WHO's List Of 10 Global Health Threats

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released a list of 10 global health threats which demand attention from WHO and health partners in 2019.

- To address these and other threats, World Health Organization has come up with a new 5-year strategic plan – **the 13th General Programme of Work**.

- This plan focuses on a triple billion target: ensuring 1 billion more people benefit from access to universal health coverage, 1 billion more people are protected from health emergencies and 1 billion more people enjoy better health and well-being.

List of Global Health Threats

Air Pollution And Climate Change

This is the gravest risk, with nine out of 10 people breathing polluted air across the world. Microscopic pollutants in the air can penetrate respiratory and circulatory systems, damaging the lungs, heart and brain, killing 7 million people prematurely every year.

Noncommunicable Diseases

- Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease, are collectively responsible for over 70% of all deaths worldwide, or 41 million people. This includes 15 million people dying prematurely, aged between 30 and 69.

- Over 85% of these premature deaths are in low- and middle-income countries. The rise of these diseases has been driven by five major risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets and air pollution.

Global Influenza Pandemic

- The world will face another influenza pandemic – the only thing that is not known is when it will hit and how severe it will be. Global defences are only as effective as the weakest link in any country's health emergency preparedness and response system.

Fragile And Vulnerable Settings

- More than 1.6 billion people (22% of the global population) live in places where protracted crises (through a combination of challenges such as drought, famine, conflict, and population displacement) and weak health services leave them without access to basic care.

- Fragile settings exist in almost all regions of the world, and these are where half of the key targets in the sustainable development goals, including on child and maternal health, remains unmet.

Antimicrobial Resistance

- The development of antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarials are some of modern medicine's greatest successes. Now, time with these drugs is running out. Antimicrobial resistance threatens to send us back to a time when we were unable to easily treat infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, gonorrhoea, and salmonellosis.

- WHO is working with these sectors to implement a global action plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance by increasing awareness and knowledge, reducing infection, and encouraging prudent use of antimicrobials.

Ebola And Other High-Threat Pathogens

- WHO's R&D Blueprint identifies diseases and pathogens that have potential to cause a public health emergency but lack effective treatments and vaccines. This watchlist for priority research and development includes Ebola, several other haemorrhagic fevers, Zika, Nipah, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and disease X, which represents the need to prepare for an unknown pathogen that could cause a serious epidemic.

Weak Primary Health Care

- Primary health care is usually the first point of contact people have with their health care system, and ideally should provide comprehensive, affordable, community-based care throughout life.

- Yet many countries do not have adequate primary health care facilities. This neglect may be a lack of resources in low- or middle-income countries, but possibly also a focus in the past few decades on single disease programmes.

Vaccine Hesitancy

- Vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccination is one of the most cost-effective ways of avoiding disease – it currently prevents 2-3 million deaths a year, and a further 1.5 million could be avoided if global coverage of vaccinations improved.

- Health workers, especially those in communities, remain the most trusted advisor and influencer of vaccination decisions, and they must be supported to provide trusted, credible information on vaccines.

Dengue

- A high number of cases occur in the rainy seasons of countries such as Bangladesh and India. Now, its season in these countries is lengthening significantly (in 2018, Bangladesh saw the highest number of deaths in almost two decades), and the disease is spreading to less tropical and more temperate countries such as Nepal, that have not traditionally seen the disease.

- An estimated 40% of the world is at risk of dengue fever, and there are around 390 million infections a year. WHO's Dengue control strategy aims to reduce deaths by 50% by 2020.

HIV

- The progress made against HIV has been enormous in terms of getting people tested, providing them with antiretrovirals (22 million are on treatment), and providing access to preventive measures such as a pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP, which is when people at risk of HIV take antiretrovirals to prevent infection).

- However, the epidemic continues to rage with nearly a million people every year dying of HIV/AIDS. Today, around 37 million worldwide live with HIV. Reaching people like sex workers, people in prison, men who have sex with men, or transgender people is hugely challenging. Often these groups are excluded from health services.

- WHO will work with countries to support the introduction of self-testing so that more people living with HIV know their status and can receive treatment

Rare Diseases

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- Days after withdrawing the national policy for treatment of rare diseases (NPTRD), the **Union health minister announced a one-time financial assistance for rare diseases** in the Parliament.

- The court had expressed shock at the withdrawal by observing that the government's somersault does not reflect well on the decision making process in the Ministry.

- Following the rebuke, the standing finance committee has approved a proposal for adding a sub-component under the umbrella scheme of Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) for provision of one-time financial assistance to those below threshold poverty line for specified rare diseases which require one-time treatment. Further, a 10 member expert committee has been formed to draft a revised policy.

- **RAN provides financial assistance to patients, living below poverty line and who are suffering from major life threatening diseases, to receive medical treatment at any of the super speciality Hospitals/Institutes or other Government hospitals.**

Rare Disease

- **A rare disease is a health condition of low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases in the general population.** It is estimated that globally around 6000 to 8000 rare diseases exist. However, 80% of all rare disease patients are affected by approximately 350 rare diseases.

- Paradoxically, though rare diseases are of low prevalence and individually rare, collectively they affect a considerable proportion of the population in any country, which according to generally accepted international research is – between 6% and 8%.

- WHO defines rare disease as a debilitating lifelong disease or disorder condition with a prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 population. However, different countries have their own definitions to suit their specific requirements and in context of their own population, health care system and resources.

- In the US, rare diseases are defined as a disease or condition that affects fewer than 200,000 patients in the country (6.4 in 10,000 people). EU defines rare diseases as a life-threatening or chronically debilitating condition affecting no more than 1 in 2,000 people.

- **India, like many other developing countries, currently has no standard definition of rare diseases** and data on prevalence. While there is no registry of rare diseases patients in India, according to government's own estimates, given in the national policy document, there are **between 70-90 million patients, while the cost of treatment may vary from Rs 18-70 lakh**.

- The most common rare diseases recorded in India are Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia and primary immuno deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.

- **80% of rare diseases have identified genetic origins and hence disproportionately impact children**, whilst others are the result of infections (bacterial or viral), allergies and environmental causes, or are degenerative and proliferative.

Need For A Policy

- Most of the 300-odd rare diseases for which treatment is available (for the rest are not) are progressive. They **require long-term and specialised treatments/management and not just one-time assistance**.

- Availability and access to medicines are important to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with rare diseases. Despite progress in recent years, **effective or safe treatment is not available for most of the rare diseases**. Where drugs are available, they are **prohibitively expensive, placing immense strain on resources of families, health systems and donor agencies alike**.

- As the number of persons suffering from individual rare diseases is small, they do not constitute a significant market for drug manufacturers to develop and market drugs for them. For this reason, **rare diseases are also called orphan diseases and drugs to treat them are called orphan drugs**.

- Due to the high cost, the government has not been able to provide these drugs for free. It is estimated that for a child weighing 10 kg, the annual cost of treatment for some rare diseases, may vary from Rupees 18 Lakhs to 1 crore 70 lakhs

- **Several countries have through legislation provided incentives to drug manufactures to encourage them to manufacture drugs for rare diseases**. The most powerful incentive for drug manufacturers is the grant of 7 to 10 years of exclusive marketing rights including protection from imports, if a drug gets orphan drug status. This means that pharmaceutical companies can price their drugs without fear of competition.

- In resource constrained settings, it is pertinent to balance competing interests of public health for achieving optimal outcome for the resources allocated.

- This raises questions of fairness and reasonability. However, it also raises issues of ethics and equity of opportunity for patients to benefit, in the interest of patients suffering from rare diseases.

- Hence any policy on treatment of rare diseases will have to strike a balance between access to treatments with health system sustainability.

Kyasanur Forest Disease

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- An outbreak of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as **monkey fever**, has been reported in some villages of **Shivamogga district of Karnataka**.

- Kyasanur forest disease (KFD) is a re-emerging **zoonotic disease endemic in Karnataka**. It is caused by Kyasanur Forest disease virus (KFDV), a member of the virus family Flaviviridae. First identified in 1957 from Kyasanur forest area, the disease derives its name from the forest range where the virus was first isolated.

- The disease can be **transmitted to human by the bite of infected ticks** or via contact with a sick or recently dead monkey. **Human to human transmission has not been reported yet**.

- Hard ticks are the reservoir of KFD virus and once infected, remain so for life. Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick.

- Large animals such as goats, cows, and sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in the transmission of the disease.

- After an incubation period of 3-8 days, the symptoms of KFD start with chills, frontal headache, and fever. Other symptoms include severe muscle pain with vomiting and diarrhoea, mental disturbances, etc. Patients may also experience abnormally low blood pressure, low platelet, red blood cell, and white blood cell counts.

- In most cases, patients can recover without complication after 1-2 weeks - but the convalescent period is typically long, lasting for several months. The estimated fatality rate is from 2% to 10% for KFD, as per National health Portal, India.

- **There is no specific treatment for KFD**, however, early medical care and supportive therapy such as maintenance of hydration and management of neurological symptoms is important.

- **A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas**. Additional preventative measures include using insect repellents, wearing protective clothing in areas particularly where ticks are endemic, and avoiding contact with dead monkeys.

Zearalenone In Cereals

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- A Journal of Food Science study has detected zearalenone in wheat, rice, corn and oats from markets in Uttar Pradesh. The study, by researchers from Lucknow's Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (IITR), found the substance in 70 of the 117 samples tested.

- Zearalenone is a fungal toxin infesting cereals such as wheat, maize and barley. It attacks crops while they are growing, but can also develop when cereals are stored without being dried fully.

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India does not impose maximum limits for zearalenone, though the European Union (EU) does. Twenty-four of the U.P. samples exceeded the EU regulatory limits of 100-200 mcg/kg of cereals.

- The study also looked at National Sample Survey Office data on Indian diets to calculate how much zearalenone people could be consuming. It found that average daily consumption through wheat and rice was 0.27 and 0.3 mcg/kg of body weight — higher than the EU limit of 0.25 mcg/kg. In highly contaminated samples, exposure could be as high as 16.9 times the EU limit.

- Zearalenone behaves like oestrogen, the female sex hormone, and could cause endocrine disturbances in humans. Its nasty effects in animals, such as pigs, are documented. When fed with mouldy corn, pigs develop inflamed vaginas, infertility and other symptoms. This is why countries like Brazil regulate zearalenone levels in animal feed.

- Fungal toxins are commonly found in food, and can be a public health concern. India regulates the levels of some of these, including aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, ergot and patulin. The first three infest cereals, while patulin is found in apples. Each of these toxins has been associated with disease outbreaks.

- In zearalenone's case, there is no strong evidence of toxicity in humans so far, though several research groups are investigating. As a result, the IARC classifies it as a Group 3 carcinogen, which means evidence is not sufficient for an evaluation yet.

- It is probably dangerous to humans too, but to be certain, it is important to know how much humans consume, how it is metabolised, and how exposure is correlated with disease.

National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted a five-year action plan for addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in the country, dumping a long-pending draft policy on the matter.

- The move comes after the ministry withdrew the draft National Drug Demand Reduction Policy from the Cabinet. It had been pending for more than five-and-half years and was redrafted twice during the period. Instead of the policy, the ministry has now prepared a national action plan.

Provisions Of The Plan

- The objective of the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (2018-2023) is to create awareness and educate people about the ill-effects of drugs abuse on the individual, family, workplace and the society at large in order to integrate them back into the society,

- It aims to employ a multi-pronged strategy — involving education, de-addiction and rehabilitation of affected individuals and their families — to address the issue.

- The ministry has planned several measures — including coordination with implementing agencies for controlling sale of sedatives, painkillers and muscle relaxant drugs, and checking online sale of drugs by stringent monitoring by cyber cell

- It includes holding awareness generation programmes at schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and for police functionaries, paramilitary forces, law enforcement agencies, judicial officers and Bar council, among others.

- Plans are also afoot for awareness generation through social, print, digital and online media, and engagement of celebrities, besides strengthening the national tollfree helpline for drug prevention.

- It also calls for persuading principals, directors, vice chancellors of educational institutions to ensure that no drugs are sold within/nearby the campus.

- Increasing community participation and public cooperation in the reduction of demand by involving Panchayati Raj institutions, Urban Local Bodies, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and other local groups like Mahila Mandals, self help groups etc is also planned.

- A steering committee would be constituted under the chairmanship of the secretary, Social Justice Ministry, and with representatives from the Ministries of Health, Human Resource Development, Women and Child Development, Home Affairs, Skill development and Entrepreneurship, among others. The committee will hold quarterly meetings to monitor effective implementation of the NAPDDR.

- It also includes identification of vulnerable areas based on survey, skill development, vocational training and livelihood support of ex-drug addicts through National Backward Classes Finance and other Development Corporations and continuous research on drug use pattern

- The ministry has also asked states and union territories to prepare action plan for ensuring facility of de-addiction centres in each district or as per prevalence of addiction and also establish separate and specialised de-addiction treatment centres.

- They have also been asked to ensure availability of treatment for drug dependents in prisons, juvenile homes and children homes and adopt approaches for education and prevention at all levels including schools and colleges

- India is vulnerable to drug trafficking as it is located between two largest opium producing regions of the world - the Golden Crescent in the west and Golden Triangle in the east. Drug trafficking and abuse pose serious threat to our societies and is matter of serious concern for all of us. It is expected that the National Action Plan with its multi dimensional approach will go a long way in curbing the demand and the overall menace.

International Forum For Advancing Global Collaboration In Homoeopathy

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The World Integrated Medicine Forum on the regulation of Homoeopathic Medicinal Products with the theme 'Advancing Global Collaboration' was recently inaugurated today by the Ministry of AYUSH.

- The three-day forum was organised by Central Council for Research in Homeopathy (CCRH), with the support of Ministry of AYUSH, Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia Convention of the United States (HPCUS) and European Coalition on Homeopathic & Anthroposophic Medicinal Products (ECHAMP), Pharmacopoeia Commission of Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy and Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).

- The forum being held for the second time serves as the only truly global platform in which the public and private sector can meet and exchange ideas on how to ensure and increase the availability of safe and effective homoeopathic medicines worldwide.

- More than a billion patients worldwide are demanding safe and effective medicines for their healthcare. As a result, the demand for Homoeopathy is growing. India is the fifth largest investor in scientific research in Homoeopathy in the world.

- There is still a highly disparate situation among countries with regard to the regulations of homoeopathic medicines and this directly affects the availability of these medicines.

- Apart from illustrating how homeopathy can be further regulated and integrated into the healthcare system in countries that have adopted the use of homoeopathy since long, the forum also brought countries to the table where homeopathy has only been recently introduced.

- Forum discussions primarily explored the commonalities as well as differences in regulatory affairs among various countries, discuss strategic regulatory and industry perspectives and possible scenarios in advancing international collaboration, ways to further enhance pharmaceutical quality standards, deliberate on integrating traditional medicine systems in primary healthcare and public health, bring forth the perspectives on setting appropriate requirements on various dimensions of drug approvals including veterinary medicine.

Digital Detox App

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The **National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)** has come up with a mobile app that helps people reduce their mobile usage.

- Developed by the **Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) clinic it tracks one's pattern of mobile usage every week and offers self-help strategies**.

- The need for the clinic was felt after studies of internet use and its effect on communities pointed to a disturbing trend. In the four years since it was opened, the clinic has seen a steady increase in the number of patients showing signs of addiction to the internet, social media, gaming and pornography.

- In an increasingly digitised world, where people broadcast every aspect of their lives on social media, the need for validation in the real world has shifted to the virtual space.

- Studies show that there is **little difference in the impact of technology across classes**. Moreover, it has been **inducing increased levels of stress among all age groups** and with addicts preferring to concentrate on their social media and digital lives it **has had quite an effect on family cohesion and bonding**.

- According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), there were 1.18 billion wireless subscribers in the country, as of March 2018 and there are 493 million internet or broadband subscribers in the country.

- A recent study by researchers from the Bocconi University in Italy and University of Pittsburgh in the US found that broadband internet usage led to a 25-minute decrease in sleep. To put this in perspective, research done in 2017 by the RAND Corporation found that decreased sleep results in efficiency losses and estimated that in Germany alone, 209,000 working days were lost as a result.

- The app asks users to specify their addiction-related symptoms, such as sleep disturbance, eye strain, loneliness, boredom, or excess Facebook usage. It also asks if their mobile usage affects their academics, work or interpersonal relationships, and has a feature where the user also has the option of sharing their progress with friends. It is built on the principle that technology de-addiction should be supportive, encouraging and fun.

- A pilot test of the app among 240 college students aged 18-25 found that **75.6% of the app's users changed their mobile use pattern and showed significant reduction in the time spent on technology**.

Grading Index To Assess States On Schooling System

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has introduced a **70-point grading index to assess the quality of school education offered by states**.

- The government will use the Index to **assess areas of deficiency in each state's school education system so that targeted interventions can be made at every level** from pedagogy to teacher training to ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.

- 35 states and Union Territories have already confirmed their participation to the Union HRD ministry which is compiling the index.

- The Index will **assess states on a 1,000 point grading system** with 10-20 points per parameter It will grade them on areas like number of existing teacher vacancies, number of direct entry recruitments especially at leadership positions, school infrastructure and so on.

- The government will also set up a separate kitty over and above existing funding mechanisms to help states take up improvement exercises.

- The Niti Aayog which was earlier developing its own School Education Quality Index will be using 33 of the 70 criteria under the index for their own assessments.

- The move is in keeping with the government's overall thrust on quality improvement, teacher training and learning outputs.

- Along with developing the index, the NCERT is helping the HRD ministry set up a Central institute of Assessment to strengthen Continuous and Comprehensive Education and handhold states in ensuring customised teacher training and work on pedagogical improvements.

- Further, the Mission to equip every school with a Digital Board is also on full throttle to provide e learning material in various languages.

Mohan Reddy Commmittee

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

A government committee, headed by IIT-Hyderabad chairman B V R Mohan Reddy to review the status of technical education in the country has submitted its report and the suggestions are being considered by the technical education regulator.

The Current Mess

- Over the last couple of decades primarily in the post-liberalisation phase, India faced the challenge of meeting the fast-growing demand of skilled workforce emanating from various key sectors of the economy.

- In its effort to pave the path to increase the footprint of technical education, the government took the lead by setting up several technical institutions. The policy continued unabated for about two decades, bereft of any meaningful appraisal or evaluation at a suitable juncture, resulting in mushrooming of engineering institutions, thus requiring immediate corrective measures.

- Barring some top-notch institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technologies (IITs), most of these institutions are unable to realistically meet the standards of education currently demanded on the national or international level. This finally leaves the graduates not truly employable or job-ready and therefore without any suitable job at the end to their four-year course.

- In December 2017, it was found that there were no takers for 51 per cent of the 15.5 lakh B.E/B.Tech seats in 3,291 engineering colleges in 2016-17.

- There are glaring gaps in regulation, including alleged corruption, a vicious circle of poor infrastructure, labs and faculty, non-existent linkages with industry and the absence of a technical ecosystem to nurture the classroom. All of this accounts for low employability of graduates.

- Besides, recently in a glaring example depicting how the uncontrolled growth in the numbers of engineering colleges has pushed the borrowers to become defaulters, the Reserve Bank of India in its reports said that the total value of non-performing assets in education sectors has grown around 142 per cent between the period of March 2013 and December 2016 to around Rs 6,336 crores.

Suggestions

- With more than half the engineering seats falling vacant every year it has advised the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to **stop setting up new colleges from 2020 and review the creation of new capacity every two years after that**.

- It also suggests that **no additional seats should be approved in traditional engineering areas** such as mechanical, electrical, civil and electronics and that **institutes should be encouraged to convert current capacity in traditional disciplines to emerging new technologies**.

- This recommendation has been justified on the ground that current capacity utilisation in traditional disciplines is just 40% as opposed to 60% seat occupancy in branches such as computer science and engineering, aerospace engineering and mechatronics.

- For the same reason, the committee has urged the AICTE to introduce undergraduate engineering programmes exclusively for artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, quantum computing, data sciences, cybersecurity and 3D printing and design.

- It suggested that **concessions should be made for applications already in the pipeline**. These may be pending for want of some minor clearances. So, applications made in the current year and the past two years may be considered for starting institutions if the infrastructure is already in place.

- Sensing the gravity and long-term implications the government intervention in the form of establishing a panel may hopefully act as a stepping stone towards bringing about some long-pending reforms in the domain of technical education in India.

ASER 2018

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- The Annual Status of Education Report 2018 was recently released by the NGO Pratham.

- It is an annual survey that aims to provide reliable annual estimates of children's schooling status and basic learning levels for each state and rural district in India.

- ASER 2018 reached 596 districts in rural India. A total of 354,944 households and 546,527 children in the age group 3 to 16 were surveyed. As part of the ASER survey, one government school with primary sections is visited in each sampled village. Preference is given to a government upper primary school if one exists in the village.

Highlights Of The Report

- **Overall enrollment (age 6-14)**: For more than ten years, since 2007, the enrollment of children for the age group 6 to 14 has been above 95%. The proportion of children who are not enrolled in school has fallen below 3% for the first time and stands at 2.8% in 2018.

- Further, ten years ago in 2008, nationally, more than 20% of girls in the 15 to 16 age group were not enrolled in school. In 2018, this figure has decreased to 13.5%.

- **Reading**: The ASER reading test assesses whether a child can read letters, words, a simple paragraph at Std I level of difficulty, or a 'story' at Std II level of difficulty.

- The percentage of all children in Std III who can read at Std II level has been climbing slowly over the past few years. This figure has increased from 21.6% in 2013 to 27.2% in 2018.

- Slightly more than half of all children enrolled in Std V can read at least a Std II level text. This figure has inched up from 47.9% in 2016 to 50.3% in 2018.

- By Std VIII, the last year of compulsory schooling in India, children are expected not only to have mastered foundational skills but to have proceeded well beyond the basic stage. The data indicates that of all children enrolled in Std VIII in India, about 73% can read at least a Std II level text. This number is unchanged from 2016.

- **Arithmetic**: The ASER arithmetic test assesses whether a child can recognize numbers from 1 to 9, recognize numbers from 10 to 99, do a 2-digit numerical subtraction problem with borrowing, or correctly solve a numerical division problem (3digit by 1-digit).

- Children in Std III who are able to do at least subtraction has not changed much, from 27.6% in 2016 to 28.1% in 2018. For government school children, this figure was 20.3% in 2016 and 20.9% in 2018.

- The proportion of children in Std V across India who are able to do division has inched up slightly, from 26% in 2016 to 27.8% in 2018.

- At the all India level, no major change is seen in students' and teachers' attendance. Average teacher attendance has hovered at around 85% and average student attendance at around 72% for the past several years in both primary and upper primary schools.

- This year, ASER introduced a series of questions on the availability of sports infrastructure in schools. In 2018, about 8 out of 10 schools had a playground available for students, either within the school premises or close by.

- Physical education teachers are scarce in schools across rural India. Only 5.8% of all primary schools and 30.8% of upper primary schools had a physical education teacher available.

Analysis

- The quality of education has a direct bearing on any economy. With some 240 million students or nearly 20% of the Indian population in school, their quality of learning or lack of it assumes significance for the competitiveness of the country and has an impact on the quality of life, efficiency at the workplace, and labour productivity issues.

- The report holds a mirror to a country that is aspiring to be a knowledge power. Like its previous editions, the report raises several worrying questions. It shows that poor learning outcomes remain the achilles' heel of the country's primary and secondary education system.

- This poor learning outcome in India is despite the Right to Education (RTE) Act having been in force since April 2010 making eight years of education compulsory for children and the centre floating schemes such as Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, apart from states' efforts.

- A quality deficit, that too for more than a decade, raises questions about the priorities of governments at the central and state levels.

- Last year, the World Bank said Indians born today are likely to be just 44% productive as workers, way below their Asian peers.

- However, a noteworthy aspect about these factoids is that government schools have been the harbinger of change. It's even more heartening that in this respect, states hitherto considered as outliers in educational accomplishment, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for example, have not lagged behind the more advanced states like Kerala and Karnataka.

Way Ahead

- As the problem has now been diagnosed and public advocacy has got the momentum, the governments and civil society need to focus on three aspects—**a bigger spending on education, political willingness to improve education and a drastic change in the quality of teacher education**.

- The RTE Act empowering as it is, it needs a supportive framework to cater to learners from different backgrounds who often cannot rely on parental support or coaching.

- The centre should **institute a review mechanism involving all States for both government and private institutions, covering elementary education and middle school**.

- Teachers' efficiency will improve only with **administrative incentives, better pay and a systematic change in the professional development** of this cohort.

India To Participate In PISA 2021

Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

In News

- India and OECD have signed an agreement to enable India's participation in the **triennial international survey** - Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) to be held in 2021.

- Schools run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UT of Chandigarh will participate in it.

- Within the country (or specific geography to be covered in case of large countries), PISA covers a sample of 15-year-old students representing all forms of schooling i.e. public, private, private aided etc.

- More than 80 countries, including 44 middle-income countries, have participated in the assessment since the first round of testing in 2000.

- PISA is **a competency-based assessment which, unlike content-based assessment**, measures the extent to which students have acquired key competencies that are essential for full participation

in modern societies. Students are assessed in reading, mathematics, science and collaborative problem-solving.

- Participation in PISA **allows benchmarking performance against a wide range of countries**. PISA uses test items aligned with international benchmarks and the test items are adapted to the local context and language, pilot tested and validated.

- Learnings from participation in PISA will help to introduce competency based examination reforms in the school system and help move away from rote learning. The CBSE and NCERT will be part of the process and activities leading to the actual test.

- The participation would **indicate the health of the education system** and would motivate other schools /states in the subsequent cycles. It will **result in improvement in the learning levels of children, enhance the quality of education in the country and would lead to recognition and acceptability of Indian students** and prepare them for the global economy in the 21st century.