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THE HINDU

Is GRAP enough to curb pollution?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- The **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** announced Stage 1 of the **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** in Delhi and NCR due to deteriorating air quality.
- Delhi's winter air quality remains a concern, **with no consistent improvement over the past four years despite GRAP implementation**.

Key Highlights:

- Every winter, pollution rises in **Delhi-NCR** and the Indo-Gangetic Plains because of **low wind speed and falling temperature**. **Stubble burning, firecrackers, vehicles and dust** add to it.
- **To respond,** the **GRAP** provides **short-term emergency measures in four stages**, linked to the Delhi AQI: **Stage I (201-300, Poor), Stage II (301-400, Very Poor), Stage III (401-450, Severe) and Stage IV (above 450, Severe+)**.
- **GRAP was first notified in 2017 by the Environment Ministry** on Supreme Court directions and was then run by the **Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA)**, which had no statutory backing.
- Because of this, **the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) with statutory backing** replaced the EPCA in 2021.
- States must **follow its directions and it can take legal action against officers** who do not follows it.
- The measures **grow stricter at higher stages**: **Stage I** limits diesel generator use, **Stage II** prohibits use of coal and firewood usage in hotels and restaurants, **Stage III** bans construction and demolition, and **Stage IV** adds a stricter construction ban and restricts truck entry into Delhi.
- **However,** GRAP only cuts pollution **sources for a short time and is not a long-term solution**.

Implications:

- Prolonged **poor to severe air quality** increases respiratory and cardiovascular risks
- Despite the **CAQM's statutory powers**, enforcement **depends on timely implementation by States**.
- **Inter-State pollution** requires **coordination** among Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- **Construction bans, vehicle restrictions and**

higher parking charges can disrupt livelihoods

Way Forward:

- Shift from emergency measures to **year-round pollution control**.
- Expand **public transport, electric vehicles and cleaner fuels** to reduce private vehicle use.
- Support farmers with **machinery, alternatives and incentives** to prevent stubble burning.
- Promote **regional coordination** through a common plan involving the Centre, CAQM and NCR States.
- Raise **public awareness** and support vulnerable groups affected by pollution-control restrictions.

Mains Question:

The Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) has become Delhi-NCR's main response to winter air pollution, yet air quality shows no consistent improvement. Critically examine the effectiveness of GRAP and suggest measures for a long-term solution.(250 words, 15 marks)

India-New Zealand trade ties set to scale new heights

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Mains: General Studies - 3

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in Focus?

- The **India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** has entered into force and it covers trade in **goods, services, skilled-worker movement, student mobility and investment**.

Free Trade Agreement: It is a pact in which two countries cut or remove import duties and ease trade rules.

- It is among India's recently signed **modern FTAs** and is expected to strengthen India's economic presence in the **Indo-Pacific**.

Key Highlights:

- The two countries already share warm ties through cricket, people-to-people links and a large **Indian diaspora** in New Zealand, yet this **closeness has not turned into trade**.
- As a result, **bilateral merchandise trade is only $1.2 billion**, with **India supplying just 1.9% of New Zealand's imports** against China's 22%.
- The reason is that **most big suppliers already enjoy preferential access to New Zealand's market**, so Indian goods face higher duties
- The **FTA removes this disadvantage** by giving **Indian goods duty-free access on all tariff lines offered**, so they compete on equal terms.
- **The first benefit will be seen in** labour-intensive goods such as apparel, leather, footwear, home textiles and carpets as average tariffs of **10%** on apparel are removed.
- **These gains can also extend** to higher-value goods such as machinery, vehicles and pharmaceuticals, where India's share is still very low.
- The FTA also **reduces repeated compliance checks for Indian pharma firms**.
- It covers **118 services sectors**(IT, healthcare, education and finance), and provides a quota of **5,000 visas** for skilled professionals along with post-study work options for students.
- This will supports India's strength in **services and human capital**.
- Finally, **investment will follow trade, as New Zealand will facilitate $20 billion of FDI** into India over 15 years.
- However, **India must build market knowledge, distribution networks and partnerships** to make full use of the deal and double trade by 2030.

Implications:

- India's **low market share** and competitors' preferential access may limit export gains.
- **Regulatory barriers** and limited market knowledge may hinder Indian exporters.
- **Limited distribution networks** and

partnerships may restrict the **FTA's benefits** for Indian businesses.

Way Forward:

- **Exporters need clear data on New Zealand's demand**, rules and buyers.
- **Stronger supply and retail links in New Zealand** will help Indian products compete.
- **Improve regulatory readiness** by ensuring compliance with New Zealand's standards
- Create commercial partnerships through to **help Indian businesses enter the market faster**.

Mains Question:

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement is seen as a step towards deeper economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Discuss the opportunities it offers to India and the challenges that must be addressed to make full use of it.(250 words, 15 marks)

The SIR verdict, serious constitutional questions

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Why in Focus?

- The Supreme Court, in its **verdict of the Bihar SIR case** (ADR v. Election Commission of India), **upheld the Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision** of electoral rolls.
- The Court allowed the ECI to make a **"limited" inquiry into citizenship** while deciding who is included in or excluded from the rolls.
- The ruling raises questions about the **ECI's powers, proof of citizenship and the stability of existing electoral rolls**.

Key Highlights:

- On June 24, 2025, the ECI ordered a fresh Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar, effectively **replacing the electoral roll updated** on January 6, 2025.
- Despite legal challenges, the **Supreme Court upheld the ECI's decision on May 27, 2026**.
- The Court clarified that the **ECI cannot determine citizenship in the strict sense**, but its decisions can **affect a person's eligibility for inclusion in the electoral roll**.
- It held that electoral **exclusion does not take away a person's claim to citizenship**, which can still be decided by the competent authority under the **Citizenship Act**.
- The verdict did **not clearly specify which documents conclusively establish Indian citizenship**, leaving uncertainty over the verification process.
- The author **criticises the verdict for granting the ECI excessive powers and risking disenfranchisement** without a pre-decisional hearing.
- The right to vote is a **constitutional right under Article 326, which provides for universal adult suffrage for Indian citizens aged 18 and above**, subject to legal disqualifications.
- Also to **register as a voter**, **Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, requires a person to be ordinarily resident** in the constituency.
- Under **Section 16 of the same Act, a person is disqualified from electoral registration** if they are **not an Indian citizen**, **declared of unsound mind by a competent court**, or are disqualified under laws relating to **corrupt practices and electoral offences**.
- In this context, **free and fair elections form part of the Constitution's basic structure**, as affirmed in Kesavananda Bharati (1973) and Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975).
- To safeguard this principle, **the Supreme Court can exercise its powers** under **Article 32** (constitutional remedies), **Article 141** (binding nature of Supreme Court law), **Article 142** (complete justice) and **Article 144** (all authorities must act in aid of the Supreme Court).

Implications:

- **Revising rolls already used in earlier elections can affect public trust** in the voter list.

- **The ECI's role in checking eligibility**, and how far it extends to citizenship, **remains a matter of debate**.
- **The lack of a clear list of citizenship documents** may lead to more litigation and inconsistent practice.

Way Forward:

- **A clear, official list of documents** that prove citizenship would reduce confusion.
- **Voters should get notice and a fair hearing** before their names are removed.
- **Deletions should** rest on the grounds in Article 326.
- **Reasons for deletions, data and appeal processes** should be made public

Mains Question:

Critically analyze the Supreme Court's verdict on the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and its implications on the constitutional rights of Indian citizens. (250 Words, 15 marks)

KEYWORDS

DRR Rice 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1

- India developed two genome-edited rice varieties, **DRR Rice 100 (Kamala)** and **Pusa DST Rice 1**, using **CRISPR-Cas (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats–CRISPR-associated protein)** technology
- It enables **precise changes to genetic material without introducing foreign DNA**
- **DRR Rice 100 (Kamala)** was developed by the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research–Indian Institute of Rice Research (ICAR-IIRR), Hyderabad**, from Samba Mahsuri rice variety.
- It matures around **20 days earlier**, provides nearly **25% higher yield** and can **help reduce water and fertiliser use and methane emissions**.
- **Pusa DST Rice 1** was developed by the **Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi**, from MTU 1010 (high-yield rice variety).
- It is designed to tolerate **salinity and alkaline conditions**, improving productivity in salt-affected soils.
- These varieties can enhance **agricultural productivity, climate resilience and food security** while improving resource-use efficiency.

Apomixis

- **Apomixis** is a process in which plants produce **seeds without fertilisation**.
- It occurs when an embryo develops **without the fusion of male and female gametes**, bypassing **normal sexual reproduction**.
- The new plants are **genetically similar to the mother plant**.
- It helps **plants keep producing high-yield crops for many generations**, so farmers may not need to buy new hybrid seeds every year.
- Scientists are studying **gene editing** to introduce apomixis into crops such as **rice, wheat and maize**.

Pradhan Mantri Viksit Gram Swaraj Yojana (PM VGSY)

- The **Pradhan Mantri Viksit Gram Swaraj Yojana (PM VGSY)** is a proposed **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** approved for **2026–27 to 2030–31**, aligned with the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.
- The scheme under the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** has an outlay of **₹7,395.55 crore**, comprising a Central share of **₹4,869.48 crore** and a State share of **₹2,526.07 crore**.
- It aims to strengthen **2.55 lakh Gram Panchayats and Traditional Local Bodies** through participatory planning, inter-departmental coordination and holistic **Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs)**.
- It seeks to build the capacity of around **32 lakh elected representatives and Panchayat functionaries**, while using digital platforms such as **eGramSwaraj**.
- The scheme promotes **transparent and accountable local governance**

through online accounting and audits to strengthen Panchayat financial self-reliance.

First Class Order of Zayed II

- The **First Class Order of Zayed II** is a high-level **UAE civilian decoration** awarded by **the UAE President for distinguished service**, exceptional courage and contributions to international relations.
- The honour is typically conferred on **diplomats, senior officials and individuals** who make significant contributions to the UAE.
- **Captain Smit Machchhar** and the **flydubai crew** were recently honoured for their bravery during a mid-air terror attack.
- Captain Smit Machchhar became the **third Indian recipient** of the honour, after former ambassadors **Navdeep Singh Suri** and **Sunjay Sudhir**.

Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)

- The **Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)** is an initiative under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, launched as part of the **National Logistics Policy (NLP)** in 2022.
- It aims to **reduce logistics costs and time**, improve efficiency, and **enhance transparency in India's logistics sector**.
- ULIP integrates **logistics-related data from multiple government ministries** and agencies through **Application Programming Interfaces (APIs)**.
- It supports **multimodal transport visibility** and real-time cargo tracking, improving coordination across the logistics supply chain.
- Its key components include **integration of ministry data sources, data exchange with private players, and a unified digital document reference**.

F-16 Fighting Falcon

- India **recently raised concerns over continued U.S. support for Pakistan's F-16 fighter aircraft fleet**, citing its implications for regional security.
- The **F-16 Fighting Falcon** is a **fourth-generation, single-engine, supersonic multirole fighter aircraft** developed by the American company **General Dynamics**, now manufactured by **Lockheed Martin**.
- It is designed for both **air-to-air combat and air-to-surface attacks**, making it suitable for multiple combat missions.
- Its key features include a **fly-by-wire flight control system** and high manoeuvrability that improves the pilot's visibility.
- The F-16 is operated by several countries, including the **United States, Pakistan and Israel**
- **India does not operate the F-16**; the Indian Air Force operates aircraft such as the **Tejas, Su-30MKI, Rafale, Mirage 2000 and MiG-29**.

Places in News

Matarbari Deep Sea Port

- The **Matarbari Deep Sea Port** in Bangladesh is significant for regional connectivity and India's access to the Northeast, with support from the **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**.
- The port is being developed in **Maheshkhali, Cox's Bazar district, southeastern Bangladesh**, along the **Bay of Bengal**, with Japanese financial and technical assistance.
- It is **Bangladesh's first deep-sea port project**, designed to accommodate large vessels and strengthen maritime trade and cargo-handling capacity.
- For **India**, the port could improve connectivity to the **Northeastern Region (NER)** through Bangladesh, reducing transportation time and logistics costs.
- The project supports **India–Bangladesh–Japan cooperation** and Japan's **Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B)**

initiative to promote investment and regional connectivity.



Brazil

- **Brazil** was recently in the news after incumbent President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva** won re-election on **25 October 2026**, securing a historic fourth presidential term.
- Brazil, officially the **Federative Republic of Brazil**, is the **largest and most populous country in South America** and the world's fifth-largest country by area.
- Its capital is **Brasília**, and it has an extensive **Atlantic Ocean coastline** of approximately 7,400 km.
- Brazil shares land borders with **Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana** (overseas department of France)
- The **Amazon River Basin and Rainforest**, **Brazilian Highlands**, **Guiana Highlands** and **Pantanal wetlands** are major geographical features of Brazil.

