DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 09-10-2024

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Chenchu tribe

Syllabus: GS-1; Tribes of India

Context

- The Chenchus of Penukumadugu have lived in the dense **Nallamala forests** for centuries, their existence intertwined with the wilderness around them.
- However, their inability to keep up with the relentless pace of modernisation has led to dwindling work opportunities under the **MGNREGA.**

About

- The Chenchu tribe is one of the indigenous tribes in India, primarily residing in the forested areas of the states of **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and parts of Karnataka and Odisha**.
- They are classified as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** by the Indian government, highlighting their social and economic vulnerability.

Geographical Location

- States: Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha.
- Primary Regions: They inhabit the Nallamala Hills, which are part of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, particularly around the Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve.

Language

- The Chenchu people primarily speak **Chenchu,** a dialect of the Telugu language. Telugu is widely spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Livelihood

- Traditionally, the Chenchus are **hunter-gatherers**, and their way of life is deeply connected to the forest.
- They hunt small animals and birds, gather forest produce such as fruits, honey, tubers, and herbs.
- With modern influences, some Chenchus have adopted agriculture, cultivating small patches of land, but their dependency on the forest is still strong.
- Many also engage in selling forest produce and minor forest products like medicinal plants.

Cultural Practices

- The Chenchu tribe follows a simple lifestyle with close-knit family units.
- They practice animism and worship forest gods, spirits, and natural elements.

- Their traditional deities include those associated with the forest and nature, although some **Chenchus have also adopted aspects of Hinduism.**
- Their festivals and rituals often revolve around forest-based practices and nature worship.

5.

Social Structure

- The Chenchu society is patriarchal, with significant roles for both men and women.
- Men are traditionally involved in hunting, while women gather forest produce and tend to family responsibilities.
- Marriage practices are simple, and cross-cousin marriages are common among them.

Housing and Settlements

- Chenchus live in **small hamlets, called pentas**, in the forest, often near water sources.
- Their houses are typically thatched huts, made from locally available materials like bamboo, mud, and grass.

Current Challenges

- **Forest restrictions:** Due to the creation of protected wildlife reserves (e.g., Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve), the Chenchus face restrictions on traditional hunting and forest activities, which have been their primary source of livelihood.
- **Developmental challenges**: Despite government efforts, the Chenchus face issues related to lack of healthcare, education, and infrastructure in their areas.
- **Displacement and loss of traditional livelihoods due to environmental policies** have forced some Chenchus to migrate to urban areas for unskilled labor jobs, which has caused cultural erosion.

Government Support

- As a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), the Chenchu tribe is eligible for various government schemes aimed at tribal development. These include:
  - Housing schemes, healthcare initiatives, and educational programs.
  - Efforts to integrate them into the mainstream economy while preserving their traditional culture.
  - **Forest rights under the Forest Rights Act (2006),** allowing Chenchus to continue using the forest for their livelihood.

Efforts for Conservation and Development

- NGOs and government agencies are working on empowering the Chenchu people by providing alternative means of livelihood, like skill development, eco-tourism, and promoting sustainable agriculture.
- Efforts are also underway to educate the Chenchu children and improve healthcare access through mobile medical units.

National Statistical Commission (NSC)

Syllabus: GS-2; Governance

Context

- The abrupt dissolution of the Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) took him by "surprise", but former Chief Statistician Pronab Sen, who headed the panel, told.

About

- The National Statistical Commission (NSC) is an **autonomous body in India, established to promote and improve the country's statistical system.**
- It plays a key role in ensuring the reliability and quality of statistical data and reports used for policymaking, governance, and planning.

Background

- The NSC was set up following the recommendations of the **Rangarajan Commission (2001)**, which was formed to review India's statistical system and recommend improvements.
- It was formally constituted in 2005 by a government resolution.

Objective

The primary objective of the NSC is to:

- **Reduce Data Gaps:** Streamline the collection, analysis, and dissemination of statistical data.
- **Improve Quality:** Enhance the credibility, reliability, and timeliness of official statistics.
- **Modernize Systems:** Develop methodologies and adopt new techniques to improve data collection and analysis.
- **Coordinate:** Ensure coordination among various statistical agencies and departments, both at the central and state levels.

Functions

The NSC is tasked with:

- **Advising the Government:** On issues related to statistical systems, development, and management.
- **Setting Standards:** Establishing standards for statistical data collection, processing, and dissemination.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Providing policy-level advice on improving the national statistical system.
- **Reviewing Data Collection:** Evaluating existing data collection methods and suggesting improvements.
- **Capacity Building:** Recommending measures for capacity building within the statistical system.

Structure

- The NSC consists of a **Chairman, four members, and an ex-officio member** (Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation).
- The members are experienced professionals in the field of statistics, public administration, economics, and related areas.

Key Reports and Initiatives

- **Annual Reports:** The NSC publishes annual reports on the status and performance of India's statistical system.
- **National Indicator Framework (NIF):** NSC has contributed to the development of frameworks such as the NIF, essential for tracking the progress of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Advisory Role in Surveys:** NSC oversees large-scale surveys like the National Sample Survey (NSS), Census, and other critical economic and social data collection efforts.

Challenges

While the NSC plays a crucial role, it faces challenges such as:

- **Coordination Issues:** Ensuring smooth collaboration between central and state statistical bodies.
- **Data Discrepancies:** Addressing inconsistencies in data from different agencies.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited financial and human resources for comprehensive statistical operations.

Significance

- The NSC ensures that India's statistical infrastructure is robust, transparent, and capable of meeting the nation's policy needs.
- It contributes to the government's ability to make data-driven decisions in areas such as the economy, health, education, and more.

Engineering service exams

Syllabus: GS-2; Governance, Education

Context

- Taking a U-turn on its 2019 decision, the Centre restored its earlier recruitment policy and gave approval to recruitment of railway officers through **Civil Services Exam (CSE) and Engineering Services Exam (ESE)** conducted by the UPSC.

About

- The Engineering Services Examination (ESE), also known as Indian Engineering Services (IES), has a long and significant historical background.
- It traces its roots back to the British colonial era, when the British Empire in India needed skilled engineers to develop and maintain infrastructure essential for trade, governance, and defense.

Colonial Era Origins (Late 19th Century)

- **Public Works Department (PWD):** The earliest form of what would eventually become IES can be traced back to the Public Works Department (PWD), established by the British during the mid-19th century.
  The PWD was responsible for building and maintaining key infrastructure such as roads, canals, railways, and bridges.
  To meet the demand for skilled manpower in these engineering domains, the British government began recruiting engineers from the UK to serve in India.
- **Engineering Services Recruitment:** By the late 19th century, the need for trained Indian engineers became evident as India's infrastructure development expanded.
  Engineering education, such as that provided by institutions like the Thomason College of Civil Engineering (now IIT Roorkee), began producing Indian engineers. Consequently, recruitment of engineers for government services started to formalize.

Post-Independence Period (1947–1960s)

- **Reorganization of Engineering Services:** After India gained independence in 1947, the need for a well-structured, nationalized system for recruiting engineers into the Indian government services became a priority.
  The newly independent government sought to expand infrastructure in various sectors, such as transportation, energy, and defense, to support national development.

- **Formation of Engineering Services Examination (ESE):** In response to these demands, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) began conducting a standardized exam to recruit engineers.
  The aim was to create a class of highly qualified technical officers who would serve in various governmental departments like the Indian Railways, Central Water Commission, Defense Production, Telecommunication, and others.
- The first formal Engineering Services Examination (ESE) was conducted in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
- The exam was designed to recruit engineers for roles in different technical services under the Government of India.

Modern Evolution (1970s–Present)

- **Expansion of Services:** Over the years, the scope of the Engineering Services grew as the Indian economy industrialized and diversified.
  New sectors such as energy, electronics, and communications emerged, and ESE adapted to include these engineering branches.
  The exam's branches initially were limited to civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering, but later expanded to include electronics and telecommunication engineering.
- **Standardization and Reforms:** Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ESE underwent reforms to standardize the recruitment process.
  The exam became more structured with three stages (Prelims, Mains, and Interview) to ensure that the best engineering talent was selected for key technical roles in the government.
- **Technological Advances:** As India's infrastructure became more sophisticated, with modern technological advances, the role of engineers in government services became crucial for ensuring quality and long-term development.
  ESE continues to evolve to meet the demands of emerging sectors like information technology, urban planning, and environmental sustainability.
- **Current Status:** Today, ESE is regarded as one of the toughest exams in India due to its highly competitive nature and the prestige associated with the positions it offers. Engineers selected through ESE work in sectors that are vital to India's national security, development, and infrastructure.
  The selected candidates hold senior managerial roles and make decisions with a lasting impact on the country's development.

Significance in Indian Infrastructure Development

- **Railways:** One of the primary engineering services filled through ESE has been the Indian Railways Service of Engineers (IRSE), which plays a key role in maintaining and expanding one of the largest railway networks in the world.

- **Defense and Telecommunications**: ESE recruits play a significant role in the defense sector, where they work on projects related to national security, defense manufacturing, and infrastructure.
  The Indian Telecommunication Services also rely on engineers from ESE to manage and expand India's communication networks.
- **National Projects:** ESE engineers are often involved in prestigious national projects such as hydroelectric dams, nuclear power plants, highways, and urban development projects.

Challenges and Adaptations

- Over the decades, the ESE has continued to adapt to technological advancements and the changing infrastructure needs of the country. The examination process has been updated to reflect contemporary issues like sustainable development, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure, ensuring that engineers entering the services are prepared to meet the challenges of modern India.
- The ESE remains one of the most sought-after career paths for engineering graduates, offering a unique opportunity to contribute directly to the nation's development at a high level.

A three-tier war in West Asia with no endgame

Syllabus: GS-2; International Relations

Context

- The article here discusses about idea behind the on going tensions in West Asia

U.S. Perspective on the Middle East

- **Jake Sullivan's Statement**: In October 2023, proclaimed the region as quieter but recognized tensions, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian context.
- **Hamas Attack**: October 7, 2023, marked a significant escalation with over 1,200 Israelis killed and around 250 hostages taken.

Context of the Middle East

- **Abraham Accords**: Agreements signed in 2020 between Israel and Arab nations (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco) aimed at normalizing relations.
- **Saudi-Israeli Relations**: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman expressed progress towards normalization.

- **U.S. Initiatives**: Biden announced an economic corridor linking India to Europe via the Middle East.

Two Narratives

- **Israeli Perspective**: Belief in "occupation without consequences," viewing Palestinian violence as a nuisance.
- **Arab Perspective**: Perception that the Palestine issue had lost geopolitical importance, allowing closer ties with Israel.

Regional Dynamics

- **Consequences of Hamas Attack**: Shifted the narrative to Israel fighting an "existential war" against terror.
- **Casualties in Gaza**: IDF reported over 41,000 Palestinians killed and nearly 100,000 injured; entire Gaza population displaced.

Three-Tier War Strategy

1. **Gaza**:
    - Objectives: Destroy Hamas, secure hostages.
2. **Lebanon**:
    - Aim to push back Hezbollah, stop rocket attacks.
3. **Iran**:
    - Seek to weaken Iran's influence and its allied militias.

Challenges Faced by Israel

- **Inability to Achieve Objectives**: Despite significant military action, Israel has not met goals in Gaza; hostages remain captive.
- **Escalation to Lebanon**: Israel expanded operations due to unmet objectives, targeting Hezbollah leadership.

Historical Context of Militant Groups

- **Effectiveness of Decapitation**: Historical examples show that removing leadership (e.g., Nasrallah of Hezbollah) does not deter militancy.
- **Hezbollah's Resilience**: Despite leadership changes, Hezbollah remains a powerful entity in the region.

The Iran Question

- **Israel's Military Capability**: Demonstrated ability to carry out targeted strikes in Iran; questions remain about deterrence.

- **Potential for Conflict**: Ongoing tensions may lead to increased hostilities, impacting Iran's nuclear strategy.

Long-term Stability and Solutions

- **Need for Ceasefire**: To reduce regional tensions, a ceasefire in Gaza is essential.
- **Addressing Palestine Issue**: Long-term peace requires resolution of the Palestine question; currently unaddressed by Israel.

Conclusion

- **Failed U.S. Strategies**: Historical failure of external powers (like the U.S.) to reshape the Middle East suggests caution in current approaches by Israel.

Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)

Syllabus: GS-3; Economy – Impact on India's trade, industrial growth, and economic diplomacy.

Context

- Citing U.S. Elections, Goyal says not time for GSP and Social Security Totalisation

What is GSP?

- The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a **trade program designed to promote economic growth in developing countries**.
- It allows **certain products to enter the markets of developed countries duty-free,** boosting the exports of developing nations and fostering economic development.

Objective of GSP

The primary aim is to:

- **Support developing countries** by improving their market access in developed countries.
- **Encourage economic growth** by promoting exports from developing countries.
- **Reduce poverty** and provide a **stable source of income** for developing nations through trade rather than aid.

Countries Involved

- **Developed Countries (Beneficiary Countries):** These countries grant preferential access to their markets for goods from developing countries. Examples include the United States, European Union (EU), Japan, etc.
- **Developing Countries (Beneficiary Developing Countries, BDCs):** Countries that receive benefits under GSP are typically developing economies, such as India, Brazil, Bangladesh, etc.

Product Coverage

- GSP covers a wide range of industrial and agricultural products.
- These include textiles, chemicals, machinery, electrical goods, and some agricultural products.

GSP Benefits for India

- India has been one of the largest beneficiaries of GSP, particularly in the U.S. market.
- Under the U.S. GSP scheme, India exported a significant number of products without facing tariffs, especially in sectors like textiles, chemicals, and jewelry.
- However, the U.S. withdrew India's GSP status in 2019, which has impacted India's trade competitiveness.

GSP Withdrawal

- The GSP status can be withdrawn if a country no longer meets the eligibility criteria.
- For instance, the U.S. suspended India's GSP status in 2019, citing market access and trade imbalances as key issues.
- This was significant for India, as the U.S. is one of its largest trading partners.

Current Status

- The U.S. has not reinstated India's GSP status, despite ongoing trade negotiations.
- The EU has its **GSP+ system**, where India remains a beneficiary, albeit with certain limitations compared to the full GSP benefits.

Advantages of GSP

- **For Developing Countries:** Provides duty-free or reduced tariffs on exports, increasing competitiveness and access to larger markets.
- **For Developed Countries:** Enables imports of goods at lower costs, which can be beneficial for industries that rely on foreign inputs.

Challenges and Criticism

- Withdrawal of GSP status affects the competitiveness of exports from developing countries like India.
- There are concerns that developed countries use GSP as a tool for influencing the trade policies of developing countries.
- The program's temporary nature can create uncertainty in the long-term trade strategies of beneficiary countries.