News Analysis (30 Apr, 2020)

Rights of Minority Institutes not Absolute: SC

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** gave its judgement on the **admission criteria of minority institutions.**

> It held that **National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)** is mandatory for admission to all the medical colleges and the **right of minority institutions is not absolute and is amenable to regulation.**

Key Points

- **Background:**
  - Few colleges challenged the notifications issued by the **Medical Council of India** (MCI) and the **Dental Council of India** (DCI) under **Sections 10D of the Indian Medical Council Act of 1956 and the Dentists Act of 1948** for **uniform entrance** examinations.
  - The management of such minority-run medical institutions held that **uniformly bringing them under the ambit of NEET** would be a **violation of their fundamental right** to **occupation, trade and business [Article 19(1)(g)]** and would **violate** their **fundamental rights of religious freedom and to manage their religious affairs (Article 25-28) and to administer their institutions (Article 30).**
  - Few petitioners claimed that **rules notified by Andhra Pradesh government are violative of rights of minority educational institutions** under **Article 30(1) of the Constitution.**

- **Highlights of the Judgement:**
  - The SC held that the **fundamental and religious rights of minorities** and rights available under Article 30 are **not violated by provisions** carved out in Section 10D of the MCI and Dentists Act.
  - The **right to freedom of trade or business is not absolute.** It is subject to **reasonable restriction** in the interest of the students' community to **promote merit, recognition of excellence, and to curb the malpractices.** A uniform entrance test qualifies the test of proportionality and is reasonable.
  - The **NEET is mandatory for admission to medical colleges run by religious and linguistic minority communities** and it would **apply for both aided and unaided** medical colleges administered by minorities.
    - NEET was started to **check several malpractices in the medical education,** to **prevent capitation fee** by admitting students which are lower in merit and to **prevent exploitation, profiteering, and commercialisation** of education.
  - Uniform entrance exams will **ensure improvement in future public health** by encouraging merit which will further enhance the **Directive Principles** enshrined in the Constitution.
  - The SC also upheld **rules framed by the Andhra Pradesh government** making **Secondary School Certificate (SSC)/Transfer Certificate (TC) the basis for a candidate's claim of minority status for admission to B.Ed courses.** The rules also **require minority institutions to allot vacant seats under management quota to non-minority students on merit.**
  - **Major Issues:**
    - It was noted that **conversion certificates were obtained by students** from other communities for admission under the management quota.
    - According to statistical data, **minority seats are highly disproportionate** and **far in excess** due to the number of colleges and total seats availability.
  - Upholding the Andhra Pradesh government's rules will **safeguard the interests of genuine minority students** against the false overnight conversions.
  - Providing admission to non-minority students will also **not interfere with the right of a Minority Educational Institution** to manage its affairs for the benefit of the Minority Community.

Minority Educational Institutions

- The term **'minority'** has **not been defined anywhere in the Constitution.**

- **Article 30** grants the following rights to minorities, whether religious or linguistic:
  - All minorities shall have the **right to establish and administer educational institutions** of their choice.
  - The **compensation** amount fixed by the State for the compulsory acquisition of any property of a minority educational institution **shall not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed** to them. (added by the **44th Amendment Act of 1978)**
  - In granting aid, the **State shall not discriminate** against any educational institution managed by a minority.
- **Minority educational institutions are of three types:**
  - Institutions that **seek recognition as well as aid** from the State.
  - Institutions that **seek only recognition** from the State and **not aid.**
  - Institutions that **neither seek recognition nor aid** from the State.
- The institutions of **first and second type are subject to the regulatory power of the state** with regard to syllabus prescription, academic standards, discipline, sanitation, employment of teaching staff and so on. The institutions of **third type are free to administer their affairs but subject to operation of general laws** like contract law, labour law, industrial law, tax law, economic regulations, and so on.
- The SC **allowed the minority educational institutions to admit eligible students of their choice** and to **set up a reasonable fee structure** in the judgement delivered in the **Secretary of Malankara Syrian Catholic College case (2007).**
  - However, it also held that the **right to establish and administer educational institutions is not absolute.** Nor does it include the right to maladminister.
  - There can be regulatory measures for ensuring educational character and standards and maintaining academic excellence.

Source: TH/IE

Final Report on National Infrastructure Pipeline

Why in News

Recently, the **task force headed by Atanu Chakraborty** (economic affairs secretary) on **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)** submitted its final report to the Finance Minister.

Key Points

- **Revised Investment Need:** The taskforce has **forecast an investment need of ₹111 lakh crore** over the **next five years (2020-2025)** to build infrastructure projects and drive economic growth.

    The final report has revised up NIP from earlier Rs 100 lakh crore in light of additional data provided by central ministries/state governments since the release of **summary NIP report.**

- **Bulk Share: Energy, roads, railways and urban projects** are estimated to account for the bulk of projects (around 70%).
- **Measures Suggested:**
    - Aggressive push towards asset sales
    - Monetisation of infrastructure assets
    - Setting up of development finance institutions
    - Strengthening the municipal bond market
- **Streamlining Process:** The task force **has also recommended to set up of three committees:**
    - **Timely Execution:** Panel to monitor NIP progress and eliminate delays.
    - **Follow Up:** Steering committee in each infrastructure ministry for following up implementation
    - **Raising Financial Resources:** Committee in the Department of Economic Affairs for raising financial resources for the NIP

Background

- The **task force was set up** after the Prime Minister, in his Independence Day speech of 2019, promised to roll out an **infrastructure push worth ₹100 trillion** over five years to make India a $5 trillion economy.
- The summary report for, National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), 2020-25 was released by the finance minister on 31 December, 2019.
- Out of the total expected capital expenditure of Rs 111 lakh crore
    - Projects worth Rs 44 lakh crore (40 % of NIP) are **under implementation.**
    - Projects worth Rs 33 lakh crore (30 % of NIP) are at **conceptual stage.**
    - Projects worth Rs 22 lakh crore (20 % of NIP) are **under development.**

National Infrastructure Pipeline

- NIP will enable a forward outlook on **infrastructure projects which will create jobs, improve ease of living, and provide equitable access to infrastructure** for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.
- NIP includes **economic and social infrastructure** projects.
- It also includes both **greenfield and brownfield projects.**
- It will help in stepping-up annual infrastructure investment **to achieve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $5 trillion by 2024-25.**

- The Centre and states are expected to have almost equal share in implementing NIP, while the private sector contribution is expected to be around 21%.

Source: IE

International Financial Services Centres Authority

Why in News

The central government has established **International Financial Services Centres Authority** to regulate all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) with headquarters in **Gandhinagar (Gujarat).**

Key Points

- **Functions:**
  - The authority will **regulate financial products** such as securities, deposits or contracts of insurance, financial services, and financial institutions which have been **previously approved by any appropriate regulator such as Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, the **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** etc., in an IFSC.
  - It will also regulate any other financial products, financial services, or financial institutions in an IFSC, which may be **notified by the central government.**
  - It may also **recommend to the central government** any other financial products, financial services, or financial institutions, which may be permitted in an IFSC.
- **Members:**
  - The International Financial Services Centres Authority will consist of **nine members, appointed by the central government.**
  - They will include **chairperson** of the authority, **a member each from the RBI, SEBI, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA);** and **two members from the Ministry of Finance.** In addition, two other members will be appointed on the **recommendation of a Selection Committee.**
  - **Term:** All members of the IFSC Authority will have a **term of three years, subject to reappointment.**

- **Possible Benefits:**
    - **Unification under one authority:** The banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC which are regulated by multiple regulators - the RBI, SEBI, and IRDAI will be unified under the IFSC authority.
    - The single window regulatory institution would **accelerate the development of India's first IFSC at GIFT City,** Gandhinagar.
    - **Both national and international institutions** dealing with international financial services would utilise the IFSC platform for **inbound and outbound investments with improved ease of doing business,** thereby making GIFT IFSC a **global financial hub.**

International Financial Services Centre:

- An IFSC enables **bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centres** by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Financial Institutions (such as banks, insurance companies, etc.) to India.
    - It offers a **business and regulatory environment** that is **comparable to other leading international financial centres** in the world like London and Singapore.
- IFSCs are intended to provide Indian corporates with **easier access to global financial markets,** and to complement and promote further development of financial markets in India.
- The first IFSC in India has been set up at the **Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in Gandhinagar.**

Source: ToI

Natural Product Based Alzheimer Inhibitor

Why in News

Scientists from **Jawaharlal Nehru Centre For Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR)** have modified the structure of **Berberine** into Ber-D to use as an Alzheimer's **inhibitor.**
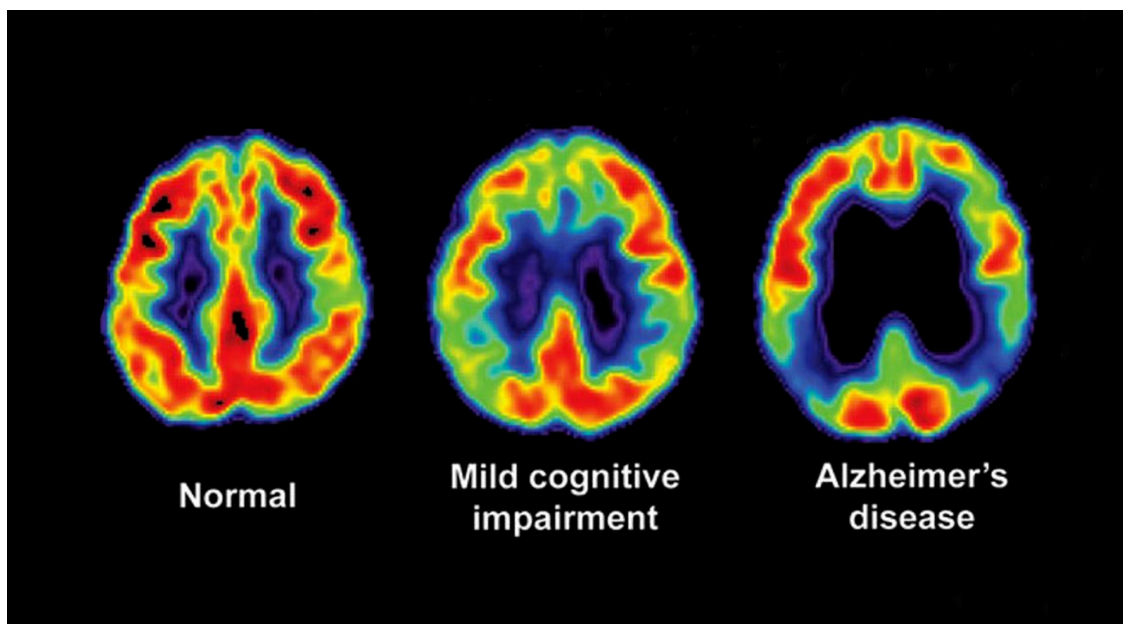
- JNCASR is an **autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology (DST),** Govt. of India.
- Berberine is a chemical found in several plants. It is a natural and cheap product similar to curcumin (a substance in turmeric). It is found in India and China and used in traditional medicine and other applications.

Key Points

- Berberine is poorly soluble and toxic to cells. So scientists modified berberine to **Ber-D,** which is a soluble (aqueous), antioxidant. They found it to be a multifunctional inhibitor of multifaceted amyloid toxicity of Alzheimer's disease.
    - **Amyloid** is a protein that is deposited in the liver, kidneys, spleen, or other tissues in certain diseases.
    - In case of Alzheimer's disease, **Amyloid beta (Aβ) accumulates in the brain.**
- **Ber-D inhibits aggregations of metal-dependent and -independent Amyloid beta (Aβ).** Further, Ber-D treatment averts mitochondrial dysfunction and corresponding neuronal toxicity contributing to premature apoptosis (cell death).
- These multifunctional attributes make Ber-D a promising candidate for developing effective therapeutics to treat multifaceted toxicity of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease

- Alzheimer's disease is a **progressive disorder** that causes brain cells to waste away (degenerate) and die.
- It is the most prevalent **neurodegenerative disorder** and accounts for **more than 70% of all dementia.**
    - Dementia is an overall term for diseases and conditions characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities.
    - Memory loss is an example.

Source : PIB

Covid-19 Related Disease

Why in News

Recently, the **Paediatric Intensive Care Society (PICS)** of the **United Kingdom** has observed an apparent rise in the number of children suffering from a **multi-system inflammatory state.** Doctors believe that it **could be related to <u>Covid-19</u>.**

Key Points

- **Multi-system Inflammatory State**
  - It is a **rare** illness that causes **inflammation of the blood vessels** leading to **low blood pressure.** It affects the entire body as it **causes a build-up of fluid in the lungs and other organs.**
  - Patients suffering from it require **intensive care to support** the lungs, heart and other organs.
  - **Symptoms:**
    - Abdominal and gastrointestinal symptoms.
    - Cardiac inflammation.
    - Overlapping symptoms of **Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)** and **Kawasaki disease** as well.
- **Toxic Shock Syndrome**
  - It is a **rare** condition which is caused by certain **bacteria** which enter the body and **release harmful toxins.**
  - It could be **fatal if not treated in time.**
  - **Symptoms:** High temperature, headache, sore throat, cough, diarrhea, dizziness or fainting, difficulty breathing and confusion.
- **Kawasaki Disease**
  - It is an **acute inflammatory disease of the blood vessels** and usually occurs in **children below the age of five.**
  - The **inflammation** in the **coronary arteries** that are responsible for supplying blood to the heart results in **enlargement or in the formation of aneurysms** (swelling of the wall of an artery), leading to **heart attacks.**
  - **Symptoms:** Fever, rashes, redness of the cornea, red and cracked lips, a red tongue and lymph node enlargement of the neck.

- **Relation to Covid-19**
    - **Only a few children** with the symptoms of the multi-system inflammatory state **tested positive for Covid-19.** So, it **remains unclear** if and how the inflammatory syndrome is related to the virus.
    - It is suggested by some doctors that the illness **may be a post-infection inflammatory response,** where the immune system gets over-stimulated.
        - A syndrome **associated with an overstimulated immune system response** is the **Cytokine Storm syndrome.**
        - This syndrome may develop as a response to **coronavirus**, **leading to sepsis, multiple organ failures and even death.**
    - This could be the reason for the negative Covid-19 test results in some children with this illness because they **could have already recovered from the virus before the inflammation set in** or the **tests simply did not detect the virus.**
    - These diseases and conditions are rare but it is **important** that **clinicians are made aware of any potential emerging links** so that they are able to give children and young people the **right care swiftly on time.**

Source: IE

New List of Names of Tropical Cyclones

Why in News

The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has released a list with the names of 169 **tropical cyclones** that are likely to emerge over the north Indian Ocean, including the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

- The report was adopted by WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) with consensus in April, 2020.
- The current list has a total of 169 names including 13 names each for 13 WMO/ESCAP member countries.

Key Points

- IMD, one of the six **Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres (RSMC)** in the world, is mandated to **issue advisories and name tropical cyclones** in the north Indian Ocean region.
- The advisories are issued to **13 member countries under WMO/ESCAP Panel** including Bangladesh, India, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

- **Benefits of naming :** Naming of tropical cyclones helps the scientific community, disaster managers, media and general masses to
    - Identify each individual cyclone.
    - Create awareness of its development.
    - Remove confusion in case of simultaneous occurrence of tropical cyclones over a region.
    - Remember a tropical cyclone easily,
    - Rapidly and effectively disseminate warnings to a much wider audience.

Naming of the Tropical Cyclones

- The **WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC)** at its 27th Session held in 2000 in Muscat, Oman agreed in principle to assign names to the tropical cyclones in the **Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.**
- The naming of the tropical cyclones over the north Indian Ocean **commenced from September 2004.**
- This list contained names proposed by then **eight member countries** of WMO/ESCAP PTC, viz., Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.
- The requirement for a fresh list of tropical cyclones **including representation from five new member countries:** Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (total 13 member countries) was tabled during the **45th session of WMO/ESCAP, held in September 2018.** The session was hosted by **Oman.**

Panel on Tropical Cyclones

- The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** and the **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)** jointly established the **Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC)in 1972 as an intergovernmental body.**
- Its membership comprises countries affected by **tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.**
- The Panel is one of the five **regional tropical cyclone bodies** established as part of the **WMO Tropical Cyclone Programme (TCP)** which aims at promoting and coordinating the planning and implementation of measures to **mitigate tropical cyclone disasters** on a worldwide basis.
    - For this purpose, there are Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC)-Tropical cyclone and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWC) for different regions.
- The main objective of the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones is to promote measures to **improve tropical cyclone warning systems in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.**

Tropical Cyclone

- Tropical cyclone is an intense circular storm that **originates over warm tropical oceans** and is characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds, and heavy rain.
- A characteristic feature of tropical cyclones is the eye, a **central region of clear skies, warm temperatures, and low atmospheric pressure.**
- Storms of this type are called **hurricanes in the North Atlantic and eastern Pacific and typhoons in SouthEast Asia and China.** They are called **tropical cyclones in the southwest Pacific and Indian Ocean region.**
- **Formation:** Tropical cyclones **form near the equator and gain their energy from the heat** that is released when water vapour condenses into rain.
- In the **southern hemisphere storms rotate clockwise and anti-clockwise in the northern hemisphere.**

Source: PIB

Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020

Why in News

The **'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020'** revealed that **conflict, violence and disasters** led to 50.8 million internal displacement across the world at the end of 2019.

- **Internal Displacement** refers to the forced **movement of people within the country** they live in due to conflict, violence, development projects, disasters and climate change.
- Report is published by **Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).**

Key Highlights

- **Displacement due to conflict**
  - All regions are affected by conflict displacement, but it is **highly concentrated in a few countries.** Of the global total of 45.7 million people displaced due to conflict and violence in 2019, three-quarters or 34.5 million, were in just 10 countries
  - **Top Five countries with highest displacement by conflict and violence are:** Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Afghanistan.

- **Displacement related to disasters**

  Nearly 1,900 disasters sparked **24.9 million new displacements** across 140 countries and territories in 2019.
  - This is the highest figure recorded since 2012.
  - Out of the 24.9 million displaced due to disasters, 23.9 were weather-related, and "much of this displacement took place in form of pre-emptive evacuations".
- **Noted efforts to prevent and respond to internal displacement**
  - Countries such as Niger and Somalia **improved their policy frameworks on internal displacement.**
  - Others, including Afghanistan, Iraq and the Philippines, **incorporated displacement in their development plans,** in their reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, or when updating risk management strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
  - The combination of **official monitoring of disaster displacement in the Philippines** with mobile phone tracking data and social media analysis helped improve planning for shelters, reconstruction and long term urban recovery.
  - Improvements in the quantity and quality of data available also enabled better reporting and analysis, which in turn informed more effective responses and risk mitigation measures.

Data Related to India

- Nearly **five million people** were displaced in India in 2019

  It is the **highest in the world.**
- **Reasons:** The displacements were prompted by increased hazard intensity, high population and social and economic vulnerability.
  - **Southwest Monsoon:** More than 2.6 million people suffered displacement due to the southwest monsoon. 2019 was the seventh warmest year since 1901 and the monsoon was the wettest in 25 years.
  - **Cyclones** Fani and Bulbul also led to huge displacements.

    Evacuations save lives, but many evacuees had their displacement prolonged because their homes had been damaged or destroyed.
- Over **19,000 conflicts and violence** also prompted the phenomenon.

  Political and electoral violence, especially in Tripura and West Bengal, led to the displacement of more than 7,600 people.

Source:IE

1.6 Billion Risk Losing Jobs: ILO

Why in News

Recently, the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** has warned that nearly half of the entire global workforce is in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed by the **coronavirus pandemic**.

Key Points

- **Informal workers at risk:** Due to Covid-19 lockdown, three-quarters of workers (some 1.6 billion people) engaged in the informal economy have suffered massive damage to their capacity to earn a living.
    - Further, without alternative income, these workers and their families would have no means to survive.
    - The global workforce is 3.3 billion people, of which more than two billion people work in the informal economy.
- **Hard-hit Sectors:** The worst-affected sectors would be **accommodation and food services, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and real estate and business activities.**
- **Suggestions**
    - The ILO calls for **urgent, targeted and flexible measures to support workers and businesses those in the informal economy** and others who are vulnerable.
    - Measures for **economic reactivation should follow a job-rich approach,** backed by stronger employment policies and institutions, better-resourced and comprehensive social protection systems.
    - International coordination on **stimulus packages and debt relief measures** will also be critical to making recovery effective and sustainable.
        - International labour standards, which already enjoy tripartite consensus, can provide a framework.

Informal Sector

- The informal sector, also known as the unorganised sector, is the part of any economy that is **neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government.**
- The informal sector **provides critical economic opportunities** for the poor.
- The informal sector is largely **characterized by skills gained outside of a formal education, easy entry, a lack of stable employer-employee relationships, and a small scale of operations.**
- Unlike the formal economy, the informal sector's components are not included in GDP computations.

- The government of India has launched **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana** as a social security for the unorganised workers.
    - It is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

- Established in 1919 by the **Treaty of Versailles** as an affiliated agency of the **League of Nations.**
    - League of Nations was disbanded in 1946 and powers and functions of ILO transferred to United Nations
- Became the first affiliated **specialized agency** of the **United Nations in 1946.**
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland
- Received the **Nobel Peace Prize** in 1969.
    - For improving peace among classes.
    - Pursuing decent work and justice for workers.
    - Providing technical assistance to other developing nations.
- The organization has **played a key role** in
    - Ensuring labour rights during the Great Depression of 1929.
    - Decolonization process.
    - The creation of Solidarność (trade union) in Poland.
    - The victory over apartheid in South Africa.
- It is the only **tripartite U.N. agency.** It brings together **governments, employers and workers** of **187 member States,** to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.

Source: TH

U.S. Priority Watch List for IPR

Why in News

India continues to be on the '**Priority Watch List**' of the **United States Trade Representative (USTR)** for lack of adequate **Intellectual Property (IP) rights protection and enforcement,** according to the USTRs **Annual Special 301 Report.**

Key Points

- **Concerns:**
  - Copyright laws not incentivising the creation and commercialisation of content.
  - An outdated trade secrets framework.
  - India **restricted the transparency of information** provided on state-issued pharmaceutical manufacturing licenses.
  - India continues to apply **restrictive patentability criteria** to reject pharmaceutical patents.
  - Absence of an effective system for protecting against the **unfair means** to obtain marketing approval for **pharmaceuticals and certain agricultural chemical products.**
  - India maintains extremely **high customs duties** directed to IP-intensive products such as medical devices, pharmaceuticals, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) products, solar energy equipment, and capital goods.
  - India was ranked among the **top five source countries for fake goods** by the **Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD)** in 2019.
  - The **government's 2019 draft Copyright Amendment Rules,** if implemented, would have "severe" consequences for Internet-content rights holders as the proposed rules broadened the scope of compulsory licensing **from radio and television broadcasting to online broadcasting.**
  - **Trademarks:** Trademark counterfeiting levels were "problematic" and there were "excessive delays" in obtaining trademarks due to a **lack of examination quality.**
    - It urged India to join the **Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks,** a treaty that harmonises trademark registration.
- **Progress Noted**
  - India had made **"meaningful progress"** to enhance IP protection and enforcement in some areas in 2019 and had acceded to the **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)** Internet Treaties and the **Nice Agreement**.
    - The Nice Agreement establishes a classification of goods and services for the purposes of registering trademarks and service marks (the Nice Classification).
  - **Online IP enforcement:** Online IP enforcement in India has improved but progress is undercut by factors including :
    - Weak enforcement by courts and the police.
    - Lack of familiarity with investigative techniques.
    - No centralised IP enforcement agency.

Special 301 Report

- The Special 301 Report identifies trading partners that **do not adequately or effectively protect and enforce Intellectual Property (IP) rights** or otherwise **deny market access to U.S. innovators and creators that rely on protection of their IP rights.**
- The report is released **annually by the United States Trade Representative (USTR).**
- Trading partners that currently present the most significant concerns regarding IP rights **are placed on the Priority Watch List or Watch List.** USTR identified **33 countries for these lists in the Special 301 Report:**
    - Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela are on the **Priority Watch List.**
    - Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Romania, Thailand, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam are on the **Watch List.**

Source: TH

Dams in China over Transboundary Rivers

Why in News

Recently, a **US-funded study** has highlighted the possible **impact of China's dams on the Mekong river** (known as **Lancang river** in China) and **countries downstream.**

> The study was published by the **Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership in Bangkok** and the **Lower Mekong Initiative.**
> - The Lower Mekong Initiative is a **US partnership with all the downstream countries** of Mekong **besides Myanmar.**
> - The Mekong flows from **China to Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.**

Key Points

- **Key Findings of the Study**
  - It also raised **questions on other Chinese dams** on rivers which originate in China like **Brahmaputra** and their similar **impact on neighbouring countries** like India.
  - China's **southwestern Yunnan province** had **above-average rainfall** from May to October 2019. However, there was **severe lack of water in the lower Mekong** in 2019 in comparison to 1992, based on **satellite data.**
  - The **Mekong River Commission** has emphasised on the need of more scientific evidence to establish whether dams caused a 2019 drought.
    - The **Mekong River Commission** comprises of **Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam,**
  - According to the study, **six dams** built since the commissioning of the **Nuozhadu dam in 2012** had **altered the natural flow** of the river.
- **China's Stand**
  - It has **called the study groundless** and highlighted the **drought faced by Yunnan** because **Lancang only accounts for 13.5% of Mekong's flows.**
  - China has maintained that the dams, it is building, are **run of the river dams** which **store water for power generation.**
- **India's Stand**
  - According to Indian experts, the study is **not conclusive** because it only considers the water flowing into the lower basin at one station in Thailand.
  - It **did not consider other dams and water-use along the course** of the river.
    - The lower basin is **not entirely dependent on flows from China,** but also **receives water from tributaries in all other countries** it flows in, which the study did not account for.
- **India's Other Concerns**
  - India has been **expressing concerns on Brahmaputra** since **2015** when China operationalised its **first hydropower project at Zangmu.** Currently, three other dams at **Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha** are being developed.
  - For India, **quantity of water is not an issue** because these are run of the river dams and **will not impact the Brahmaputra flow.**
    - More importantly, **Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent on upstream flows** and an **estimated 35% of its basin is in India.**
  - However, India is concerned about the Chinese activities affecting the **quality of water, ecological balance and the flood management.**
  - <u>**India and China**</u> **do not have a water sharing agreement.** Both nations **share hydrological data** so it becomes **important to share genuine data** and have **continuous dialogue** on issues like **warning of droughts, floods** and<u> **high water discharges.**</u>

<u>**Source: TH**</u>

Aero India

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Defence has announced that the **13th edition of Aero India** will be held from February 3 to 7, 2021 at Air Force Station Yelahanka (Karnataka).

Key Points

- Aero India is a **biennial international military and civil airshow.**
- It is a premier event that draws **international and Indian military and civil aircraft makers,** their support industries, military brass and government dignitaries, and business visitors.
- The Yelahanka air base, about 30 km from the city centre Bangluru has been hosting the air show in February **since it was started in 1996.**
     - The 2021 Aero India will be organised by the **Defence Exhibition Organisation, Ministry of Defence.**
- In 2019 it was organised by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL).

Defence Exhibition Organisation

- It is an **autonomous organisation of the Indian Government** established in 1981.
- The organisation was **established to promote export potential of the Indian defence industry.**
- The agency is responsible for **organising international exhibitions such as DEFEXPO** and Indian participation at overseas exhibitions.

Source: TH