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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS





## Daily Current Affairs from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Assam Tribune*

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#### GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

##### 1. Schooling in India in times of poor air quality

**Context:** Schools in Delhi as a part of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to tackle air pollution, which is triggered when the Air Quality Index (AQI) is “poor” had been asked to switch from physical to online mode. While other restrictions are imposed as a part of GRAP might have an impact on air quality, the decision to switch schools to online mode needs to be examined for its scientific rationale, practicability, and benefits and risks. And when the younger children are forced to attend online classes, they are being exposed to more harmful behaviour than receiving any possible or perceived benefit therefore, the focus must be on keeping schools functional and ensuring learning continuity.

##### Key points

- **Overview:** The revised GRAP contains targeted actions that need to be taken by the agencies responsible/ implementing agencies when AQI (Air Quality Index) of Delhi goes beyond a certain threshold.
- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** GRAP is a set of emergency measures that kick in to prevent further deterioration of air quality once it reaches a certain threshold in the Delhi-NCR region.

Implementation - From 2021 onwards, the GRAP is being implemented by the CAQM. The EPCA was dissolved and replaced by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in 2020.

- **Revision of GRAP:** *Stage I (Poor Air Quality - AQI 201-300)* - Enforce NGT / Hon'ble SC's order on over aged diesel / petrol vehicles.

*Stage II (Very Poor- AQI 301-400)* - Targeted actions to combat air pollution at identified hotspots in the region. Regulated operations of DG (Diesel Generators) have been set across all sectors in the NCR.

*Stage III ('Severe'- AQI 401-450)* - Impose strict restrictions on BS III petrol and BS IV diesel four-wheelers in certain areas and may suspend physical classes in schools for primary grade children up to Class 5.

*Stage IV (Severe Plus- AQI greater than 450)* - When the AQI exceeds 450, four-wheelers registered outside Delhi, except for electric vehicles, CNG vehicles, and BS-VI diesel vehicles and vehicle carrying essential commodity, will not be allowed to enter the city.

- **Ways to keep the schools functional:** *First*, schools should not be made to switch to online classes, no matter what the level of AQI is. The focus should be on keeping the school functional and ensuring learning continuity. Can be done by halting all outdoor activities in schools when the AQI is poor, personal protective measures, etc

*Second*, to attend school, there is no need for a uniform directive for mask wearing. So, if children and parents wear a face mask at home, they can wear it at school as well.

*Third*, in schools or other settings which have functional air purifiers, mask wearing is not going to provide any additional advantage. For such settings, i.e., schools, ensuring that the classroom doors and windows are closed properly and switching on air purifiers at least an hour before children arrive would ensure 'good' quality air.

*Fourth*, 'online schooling' is an oxymoron, an option of hybrid classes should not be interpreted conveniently by schools.

*Fifth*, poor air quality is a reminder that anyone who has pre-existing health or respiratory conditions should take better care of their health. This means having a routine checkup and a regular follow-up visit with health-care providers.

- **Some impacts of air pollution:** *Breathing Problems* - Continuous exposure to poor quality air can lead to development of bronchitis. It can cause cough, breathlessness, and wheezing in people.

*Chronic Diseases* - Poor air quality has potential to cause heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. This will reduce the lifespan of the population.

*Health Burden* - Poor air quality and the resultant health effects can be a financial burden on households and the government.

*Water Pollution* - Nitrogen oxides emitted from power plants, cars, trucks, and other sources contribute to the amount of nitrogen entering aquatic ecosystems. This causes eutrophication.

*Vegetation Growth* - Studies have shown that poor quality of air can damage crops and trees in a variety of ways. This will affect growth of greenery and food security.

- **Conclusion:** Air pollution is a big menace for the society, especially in a city like Delhi, which faces this issue annually. It is therefore necessary to carry out steps that provide a long-term solution to this problem.

Q. An essential condition to eradicate poverty is to liberate the poor from the process of deprivation. Substantiate this statement with suitable examples. (দৰিদ্ৰতা নিৰ্মূলৰ বাবে এটা অত্যাৱশ্যকীয় চৰ্ত হ "ল দৰিদ্ৰ লোকসকলক বঞ্ছনাৰ প্ৰক্ৰিয়াৰ পৰা মুক্ত কৰা।" উপযুক্ত উদাহৰণৰ জৰিয়তে এই বক্তব্যক প্ৰমাণ কৰক।)

## GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

### 2. The right to work deleted

**Context:** The MGNREGA scheme ensures the right to work for 100 days per year per rural household. However, it has been observed that there is an increasing number of worker deletions with a total of 10.43 crore MGNREGA workers across the country in the past four years alone. Schedule II, Paragraph 23 of the Act outlines the procedure for deletions of workers from job cards, if the Gram panchayat is satisfied at any time that a person has registered with it by furnishing false information, it may direct the Programme Officer to direct his name to be struck off from the register and direct the applicant to return the job card. The surge of deletions in 2022-23 coincided with the period when the Union Government issued several circulars making Aadhaar-based payment systems (ABPS) mandatory in MGNREGA.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** The implementation guidelines for MGNREGA are outlined in Master Circulars issued by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) annually or biennially.
- **Recent policy:** *Administrative Efficiency* - Governments may argue that streamlining policies and removing cumbersome regulations can enhance efficiency in employment programs.  
*Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems (ABPS)* - The push for ABPS has led to increased deletions of job cards, as officials focus on compliance metrics rather than ensuring workers' rights are upheld.  
*Political and Economic Pressures* - There may be external pressures to reduce welfare spending or adjust labour policies in response to economic conditions, leading to a perception that the 'right to work' is less critical.
- **Impact of the new policies:** *Workers' Rights* - It undermines the legal protections afforded to workers, making it easier for authorities to arbitrarily delete job cards without proper verification or due process.  
*Unions and Collective Bargaining* - Unions may find it challenging to advocate for workers' rights when legal entitlements are diminished, weakening their bargaining power.  
*Labour Market Dynamics* - A reduction in guaranteed employment can lead to increased unemployment and underemployment, exacerbating poverty and economic inequality among rural populations.
- **Way forward:** *Strengthen Oversight and Accountability* - Implement independent audits, regular reviews, and grievance redress mechanisms to ensure adherence to due process in job card deletions, with active involvement of Gram Sabhas and worker representatives.  
*Enhance Worker Protections* - Reinforce legal safeguards for the 'right to work' by improving transparency in employment programs, ensuring compliance with MGNREGA mandates, and addressing systemic issues like ABPS-linked exclusions through inclusive digital solutions.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF 'RIGHT TO WORK' IN CONTEXT OF LABOR LAWS

The 'right to work' is a fundamental principle in labour laws that guarantees individuals the opportunity to engage in employment and earn a livelihood. In the context of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), specifically provides rural households with a legal entitlement to at least 100 days of wage employment per year. This right is significant because it aims to alleviate poverty, promote social justice, and ensure economic security for rural populations. The act also mandates due process in the deletion of workers from job cards, emphasising the importance of transparency and accountability in employment practices.

## GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

### 3. US Indo-Pacific strategy & NE

**Context:** Northeast India must adopt sustainable development policies and leverage its unique strengths in biodiversity, ecotourism and cultural heritage to overcome dependency and integrate into global trade and regional strategies. For decades we have discussed the Look East Policy turned Act East Policy as if it's a survival kit for a land-locked Northeast. The people of the Northeast are major stakeholders, and still they were never consulted while this policy was framed. It emerged from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and is usually discussed among MEA mandarins. The latest round of discussions was organised at Shillong by the Observer Research Foundation in collaboration with the US Consulate, Kolkata, on November 26.

#### Key points

- **New Indo-Pacific Strategy:** The US is banding together with nations like India, Australia, Japan and South Korea to ensure that the sovereignty of Indo-Pacific nations is protected. The United States has bolstered its military presence in the South China Sea and has put nations around the world on notice that the sale of key infrastructure and technology companies to China threatens their national security.
- **Cultural dimension to Indo-Pacific:** *Geo-cultural dimension* - At Kolkata, intellectuals and performers in the cultural domain from India, the U.S., Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh reflected on the Indo-Pacific construct's cultural dimensions. Moving beyond geopolitics and geo-economics, neighbors should focus on "the geo-cultural dimension" of the Indo-Pacific.  
*Expanding people to people cooperation* - Diplomats from the region agree on the importance of expanded people-related cooperation which would lead to wider acceptance of the Indo-Pacific and consolidation of the Quad.
- **India's Role in the Indo Pacific Region:** India has been one of the major players in the region. India conducts many naval exercises with the United States, countries of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Last time in 2015, with the United States, India issued a strategic vision for the Indian ocean and the Pacific, in which maintaining the security in the South China Sea, was also mentioned. ONGC Videsh Ltd is prospecting for oil and gas in the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam. India imports 82% of its oil. It needs oil from wherever it can get. Therefore, explorations at the South China Sea are very important for it. The international community including India wants freedom of navigation, freedom of over flights in the region, especially the South China Sea.
- **India's Act East Policy (AEP):** India launched India's 'Act East' policy in 2014. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions.
- **Importance of North-East:** *Security of India* - The Northeast which comprises seven 'sisters' or States and one 'brother', Sikkim, has been witnessing transformation as it heads towards better security conditions and development  
*Geography and Biodiversity* - North-eastern Indian States are blessed with a wide range of physiographic and ecoclimatic conditions and the geographical 'gateway' for much of India's endemic flora and fauna.  
*Siliguri corridor only connecting link* - North-East is home to 3.8% of the national population and occupies about 8% of India's total geographical area. Siliguri corridor, a narrow strip of land in West Bengal, popularly known as "chicken's neck" connects this region to the rest of mainland India.

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### 4. Indian Army receives logistics drones for use in eastern sector

**Context:** The Army has received Sabal-20 logistics drones procured from EndureAir Systems for deployment in the eastern sector, the company announced on Wednesday. And another development took place at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IIT-K) where they announced a major advancement in stealth technology by launching the Metamaterial Surface Cloaking System — Anālakshya. Sabal-20 is an electric unmanned helicopter based on variable pitch technology, and capable of carrying payloads of up to 20 kg.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** The Indian Army has inducted the Sabal-20 logistics drone, to enhance its operational capabilities in rugged terrains, especially in the eastern sector.
- **About Sabal-20 Drone:** Electric unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) with variable pitch technology and large rotors, inspired by Chinook helicopters. Features tandem rotor configuration for improved lift and stability in high-altitude and rugged terrains.
- **Features of Sabal-20 Drone:** *VTOL (Vertical take-off and landing) Technology* - Enables vertical take-off and landing, suitable for confined and challenging environments.  
*Stealth Operations* - Low RPM design minimizes noise, ideal for sensitive missions.  
*Long-Range and High-Altitude Capability* - Supports delivery of critical supplies like ammunition, food, and medical equipment in inaccessible areas.  
*Durability* - Designed for tough terrains and extreme operational demands.
- **Significance:** Enhances the Indian Army's logistical efficiency in remote and high-altitude regions. Promotes indigenous defense manufacturing under "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat".
- **Analakshya MSCS (Metamaterial Surface Cloaking System):** It is an Intelligence gathering through surveillance and reconnaissance is the lynchpin in today's dynamic modern warfare. Synthetic Aperture Radar's (SAR) imaging all weather efficacy affords an unprecedented access to accurate target images by day and night.