Prelim Bits 12-09-2019

Air pollution in Delhi

- Delhi government said that pollution levels primarily the concentration of particulate matter, has reduced by 25% over a period of 4 years.
- In 2014, a global study on air quality trends by the WHO had declared Delhi the most polluted city in the world.
- Since then, the Centre, state and courts have taken several steps to arrest pollution in the city.
- Delhi, through its pollution control committee, started monitoring air quality in real time only in 2010.
- DPCC data from 2012 to 2019 show 2018 saw the lowest average concentration of PM2.5.
- The most polluted months of the year are November, December and January, with pollution peaking in November.
- It is in November that the highest volume of crop residue is burnt in Haryana, Punjab and UP.
- It is also when temperatures fall and humidity rises, aiding the increase in concentration of pollutants in the air.
- However, as the chart shows, **PM2.5** concentrations have fallen over the years in November as well.
- Between 2012 and 2018, the concentration of **PM10** reduced by 21% from an average.
- PM10 is more prominent in the air in winter, primarily because of open burning and road and construction dust.
- Weather conditions are also the reason why winters are more polluted than summers.
- Cold, foggy, windless days help in the accumulation of pollutants.
- Between 2014 and 2017, the Delhi government, CPCB and Environment Pollution Authority,

    1. Carried out drives, issued orders,
    2. Implemented orders passed by NGT to curb air pollution,
    3. Implementation of the odd-even road rationing scheme.

- Graded Response Action Plan (**GRAP**),

1. This is notified by the Central government in 207.

2. It provided state governments in Delhi and the NCR with a roadmap for action.
3. If the air was severely polluted for more than 48 hours, for example,
    - The entry of trucks would be stopped, and
    - all construction work halted.
    - The GRAP also set roles for each agency, fixing accountability.

- Other measures by government which made a big difference are,
    1. Shutting of the 2 thermal power plants in Delhi,
    2. a ban on PET Coke as industrial fuel, and
    3. Introduction of BS VI fuel,
- Open burning has been largely curtailed in the city and stringent fines have meant the practice has almost disappeared.

Drought-forecasting toolbox

- 'Drought-forecasting toolbox' was unveiled at **UNCCD** COP14 event.
- It aims to track, assess and deliver relevant information concerning climatic, hydrologic and water supply trends.
- It is a kind of knowledge bank that may be used by vulnerable countries, including India, to reduce drought risk, be better prepared and effectively respond to it.
- It is developed through the close partnership among,
    1. UNCCD,
    2. World Meteorological Organisation (WMO),
    3. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and global bodies.
- It also provides the stakeholders,
    1. Easy access to case studies and other resources to support action on drought preparedness
    2. It aims to boost the resilience of people and ecosystems to drought.
- It will help the countries in framing their respective national drought policies in due course based on monitoring, forecast, and early warning.

SCO's Eurasian Economic Forum

- India skipped a meeting of the 'Eurasian Economic Union' (**EAEU**), which was organised by **SCO** in China.
- India has been a member of the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' (**SCO)** since 2017.
- The entire event is foreshadowed by the China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'

(**BRI**).

- In 2018, China and Russia in the 23rd annual meeting between heads of government both sides expressed, willingness to dovetail the China's **BRI** and Russia's 'Eurasian Economic Union'.
- The BRI is a mammoth infrastructure project unveiled by China which plans to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa.
- The 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor', an important part of the **BRI**, passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- So, India strongly opposed the BRI, as no country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- This made India to skip the SCO's Eurasian Economic Forum as the entire event is foreshadowed by **BRI**.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- It is an intergovernmental body for security and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.
- It was formed in 2001 by the **'Shanghai Five'** (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan).
- It was formed in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991.
- Uzbekistan joined the SCO in 2001, with India and Pakistan following suit in 2017.
- The SCO has traditionally prioritised on counter-terrorism, listing terrorism, separatism and extremism as "the three evils".
- However, since its formation, the SCO's domain has expanded to include subjects such as culture and economics.
- Since the BRI's launch in 2017, India has remained firm on not singing it off at the SCO's annual summits in 2018 and 2019.
- The summit's declarations of both years reflected the endorsement of controversial project.

Source: PIB, The Indian Express

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