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CIVIL SERVICES ACHIEVERS' POINT

A ONE STOP SOLUTION FOR UPSC/APSC/SSC & BANKING

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE ANALYSIS

DATE - 5TH APRIL 2021

For Preliminary and Mains examination

As per new Pattern of APSC

(Also useful for UPSC and other State level government examinations)

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EDITORIALS

1. Harsh reality (GS 5 – Internal Security)
2. Quippo executives (GS 5 – Women Empowerment)
3. Guwahati's water woes (GS 5 – Water management)

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ARTICLES

Quippo executives

- The release of Pranab Kumar Gogoi, one of the two Quippo executives abducted by the banned ULFA (I), has come as a big relief not just for the victim's family members but for all the right-thinking people of the State.
- But more disturbingly, the other abducted executive Ram Kumar who hails from Bihar, is yet to be freed and his whereabouts are unknown. While the ULFA (I) was pressurized into announcing that the duo would be released by the intensifying mass opinion against the outfit in the wake of the abduction, it was expected that both the persons who had been held hostage for three-and-a-half months would be safely released.
- But it seems the fate of one of the hostages is still uncertain and the ULFA must clarify its position on the matter and release him at the earliest. Over the years the banned outfit has lost credibility when it killed several hostages including a Russian engineer and a well-known social worker even after indicating that they could be released.
- One does not expect the Quippo employee to meet with a similar fate and the ULFA must honour the groundswell of public sentiment that has developed since the abduction of the duo. Civil society must question the ULFA over the developments and intensify public opinion for immediate release of Kumar.
- The ultras need to understand that there is nothing heroic about abducting innocents and shedding their blood. Rather, it is the most despicable crime that can be committed.
- An alarming increase in the incidence of different crimes including abduction has emerged as a disquieting concern in the State. The Home Ministry's successive 'Crime in India' reports have ranked Assam as a dangerous place in the country. Among the different crimes, abduction has recorded an unprecedented high.
- While abduction for ransom by militants and antisocial elements has been common, involvement of surrendered ultras in a good number of the cases in a disturbing trend. It shows that despite joining the mainstream after professing to abjure violence, many of them have not yet parted with their criminal ways.
- It is an open secret that surrendered militants are running unholy business syndicates – often resorting to intimidation, abduction and violence to hold their dominance. Regrettably, the government machinery continues to take a lenient view of the illegal acts of these so-called former rebels who actually have very little to differentiate themselves from ordinary criminals.

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- The worsening crime situation presents the functioning of the State police in poor light. A below-par functioning on its part is definitely having an impact on the spurt in crimes, with the law-enforcing machinery finding it increasingly tough to match the sophisticated modus operandi of the criminals.
- This erodes the faith of the common man in the police and the justice delivery system. The incompetence of the Police Department is deep-rooted and long-term planning and reforms are imperative to make the forces respond to crimes with clinical efficiency.

Harsh reality

- That Indian society is male dominated is a harsh reality reflected in their poor representation in the political sphere of the nation. No doubt, in India, we notice that with every election, more women MPs are elected. For instance, 78 women candidates were elected to Parliament out of around 700 female candidates who contested the 2019 general elections, the highest number so far.
- Yet, when we consider that the number of male MPs are 176, above twice that of their female counterparts, or that in the Rajya Sabha only 20 out of the 240 MPs are women, we can recognize the fact that such 'progress' is not enough. Statistics at the State Assemblies level reveal that the situation is even worse.
- Ironically, female representation remained low even when parties were led by women, as exemplified by the Congress under Indira Gandhi, the AIADMK under late Jayalalitha or the Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee.
- One recalls that sometime back the concept of reserving 33% seats for women, championed by all-India parties like the BJP and the Congress, had been mooted, but it soon lapsed into thin air in a blatant illustration of male hypocrisy. Sadly, as if to drive home the contradiction of women being meagrely represented in the biggest democracy in the world, in the ongoing Assam Assembly elections, there has actually been 'regression' of female participation as candidates!
- In the 2016 Assam Assembly elections, there were 91 women candidates in the fray with eight winning, while in 2011, 85 women contested and 14 made it to the Assembly, the highest number elected thus far to the House. In blatant contrast, only 74 women candidates are in the fray for the three-phase Assam Assembly elections this time, comprising just 7.82% of the total 946 candidates in the fray for the 126-member Assembly.
- It is unfortunate that the recognized political parties have been chary of choosing women as their candidates. The BJP has given tickets to seven women candidates, one more than the last polls, while its alliance partner the AGP has put up two aspirants, the same as in the last elections.
- The Congress has nine women in the fray while its allies like the AIUDF and BPF have one each. The regressive nature of such allocations of tickets to women is testified to by the fact that the so-

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called *Mahajot*'s total of 12 women candidates in this Assembly poll is less than the 16 women given tickets by the Congress when it contested the 2016 Assembly elections alone.

- The above numbers pale into greater insignificance when one considers that these all-India parties are contesting almost all the 126 seats. The biggest irony is that, despite the inadequate number of female candidates, women had voted in higher numbers than males in the first phase of these elections!

Guwahati's water woes

- One single but most crucial issue that immensely influences our day-to-day life is water because it is our life. We need water for life just as food does. We can survive without food at best supposedly for a month, but we cannot survive without water for long.
- It is also required for many other purposes such as sanitation, irrigation, to mention a few, in our day life. Civilization thrives around a region where water supply is steady and regular. So it is as plain as a pikestaff that water plays a very significant role in our life.
- But most countries in the world are currently suffering from the acute crisis of safe drinking water. In India too, it is really frustrating that even after the long 75 years of the country's independence, drinking water still continues to be one of the biggest crises with close to 70% of the country's citizens, as per a survey, having no access to piped drinking water, though the civic authorities' could have managed to harness and preserve water from rainfall or make its judicious and frugal use.
- Some parts of Chennai were faced with acute water shortages way back in 2019 when all the four reservoirs ran dry after the onset of the delayed monsoon. The resultant crisis could have well been surmounted had it been judiciously and meticulously utilized when it was known that there was mounting pressure of an increasing population in Chennai as in other cities.
- What must have taken one by surprise is how a country which can send *Chandrayaan* for lunar exploration could have come a cropper in tiding over the brewing water crisis. If the situation is further allowed to drift without seriously attempting to develop ways to address the growing crisis, the problem is only likely to aggravate with a growth of population and indiscriminate extraction of surface water making water tables fall sharply in most cities in the country.
- Depressingly, what is literally happening is that Indian cities are growing at a faster pace than the civic authorities could provide access to safe water to the people, in water-scarce and water-starved urban zones in particular, a phenomenon that must be looked into. It has been reported that in urban areas, 50 million people in as many as 15 cities have no access to safe, affordable water.

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- Look at Guwahati. Nestling on the edge of the mighty Brahmaputra flowing majestically along its entire stretch, the city, until before the shifting of the State capital to Dispur from Shillong in 1971, had abundance of water resources with innumerable marshy and water bodies almost all around it. But the city started facing acute scarcity of pure drinking water supply since the last two decades or so.
- A growing population and large-scale exodus to Guwahati from various parts of Assam and the north-eastern region over the past two decades, for higher education, better employment opportunities and relatively improved healthcare facilities, as well as the rapid haphazard growth of the city, have unsurprisingly served only to take a heavy toll on the existing limited civic amenities in the city. Resultantly, shortage of drinking water, water-logging, traffic snarls, flash floods, encroachment of pavements have snowballed into major problems in the city.
- With water turning out to be an elusive commodity, the bounden duty of the civic authorities is to put in place a judicious and economic water use mechanism. It is a matter of concern that they have been unable to provide at least 40% of Guwahati's taxpayers access to safe, clean drinking water despite the Brahmaputra flowing through the State.
- From a recent study of the Guwahati Jal Board's official website, what is fathomable is that most of the existing water supply plants have already outlived their intended utilities and, as such, they need their immediate replacement. But the authorities concerned were allegedly hemming and hawing to do so. Although currently, over 30% of the city-dwellers have access to piped water, yet the supply is reportedly almost unsteady and its quality is poor with seeping of polluting groundwater during flooding in particular, through worn-out, broken, old and aging distribution pipes.
- As a significant section of the Guwahatians has no access to piped water, they have to bank on their own bore-wells. But in the past few years in many localities of the city, such as Christian Basti, parts of Anil Nagar, Nabin Nagar, Ulubari, Lachit Nagar, etc., to name a few, the bore-wells have dried up with the abnormal rise in the residential and commercial buildings around. The consequent shortage of drinking water has, therefore, compelled the residents to purchase water delivered by private tankers at exorbitant prices.
- But nobody is sure about if it is fluoride- and arsenic-free water which is known to cause cancer. Excessive fluoride in water can result in dental fluoride. It is reported that toxic substances like fluoride and arsenic contents are present in the groundwater pumped out by residents in some localities of the city.
- What must cause one concern is a survey report conducted a few years ago by an organization called Antodaya, which found after 120 water samples collected in different parts of the city that about 20 were fluoride-contaminated. Panjabari, to exemplify, is a locality that was identified as heavily fluoride-contaminated. The situation has further worsened by the existent poor drainage

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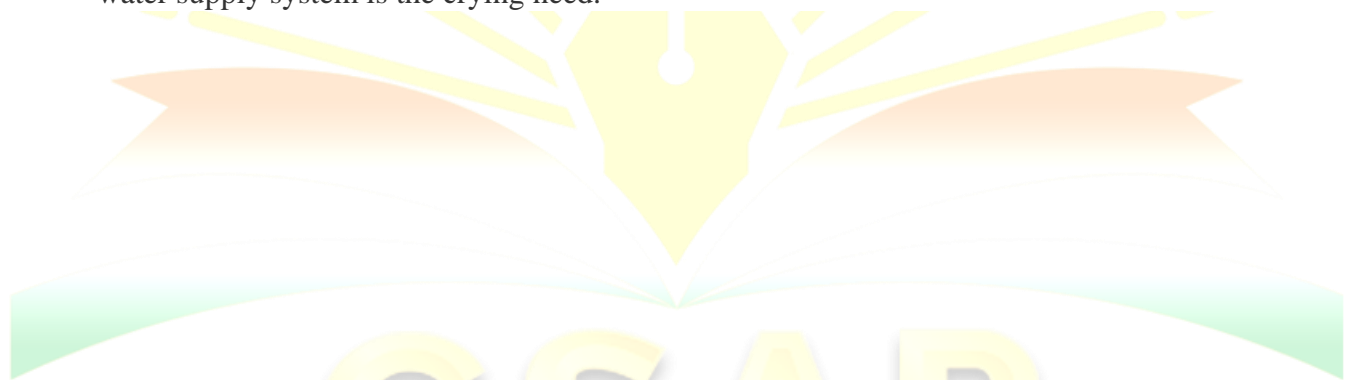
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system and inadequate sanitation facilities that have also contributed to groundwater contamination and exposed the inhabitants in Guwahati to a number of water-borne diseases.

- In spite of a major chunk of its residents risking their lives by consuming contaminated water year after year, some politicians who are contesting for the East Guwahati seat, far from promising to address the water contamination issue on getting elected, rather skirted to make it a major poll plank during their recent tenacious campaigns for the seat.
- Yet another major irritant is groundwater depletion. A study undertaken by the Centre for Science and Environment discovers that 48% of India's urban water supply comes from groundwater. It also reveals that in seven of the country's 10 most populous cities, groundwater levels have dropped significantly over the past two decades. In Guwahati, the real estate boom for the past two decades has hastened groundwater depletion process.
- Given the seriousness of the emerging situation, the State Government should be sensitive to the legitimate needs of the citizens and pop up with some innovative approach to resolve the brewing crisis. As the Brahmaputra is flowing along the northern part of Guwahati, introducing an effective water supply system is the crying need.



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