



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 20-12-2024

GS-2

1. Uniform Civil Code
2. Joint Parliamentary Committee
3. Radhakrishnan panel

GS-3

4. U.S. Federal Reserve Rate Cut
5. Agri-carbon market

Uniform Civil Code

Syllabus: GS-2: DPSP

Context:

- The union Home minister recently reaffirmed government commitment to implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) nationwide.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) - UPSC Notes

Introduction

- **Definition:** UCC seeks to establish a unified legal framework to replace personal laws based on religion and customs, ensuring its applicability to all citizens irrespective of their faith.
- **Scope:** Encompasses areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption to promote equality and secular principles.

Salient Features of UCC

- **Standardized Legal Framework:** Proposes a consistent set of laws governing civil matters across all communities.
- **Promotion of Gender Justice:** Seeks to eliminate discriminatory provisions, particularly against women.
- **Secular Approach:** Detaches civil laws from religious doctrines, ensuring neutrality.
- **Social Cohesion:** Fosters a unified legal identity, strengthening national integrity.
- **Ease of Legal Procedures:** Simplifies the legal system by addressing conflicts arising from diverse personal laws.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 44:** As a Directive Principle of State Policy, it directs the State to secure a Uniform Civil Code for all citizens.
- **Article 14:** Ensures equality before the law and equal protection under the law.
- **Article 25:** Grants religious freedom, necessitating a balance between individual rights and collective uniformity.
- **Concurrent List (Seventh Schedule):** Entry 5 empowers both the Centre and States to legislate on marriage, divorce, adoption, and succession.

Rationale for UCC

- **Gender Parity:** Ensures equal rights across genders by addressing biases in personal laws.
 - *Example:* Hindu Succession Act grants equal inheritance rights to daughters, but Muslim women remain excluded from similar benefits.
- **Prevention of Misuse:** Addresses exploitation of loopholes in religious laws.
 - *Example:* Misuse of triple talaq prior to its ban.
- **Unity in Diversity:** Provides a common legal framework to unite various communities.
 - *Example:* Persistent communal conflicts underscore the necessity of legal uniformity.
- **Streamlined Legal System:** Reduces discrepancies arising from different personal laws.
 - *Example:* Disputes in inheritance practices among different communities in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- **Protection of Vulnerable Groups:** Safeguards marginalized sections from inequitable customary practices.
 - *Example:* Tribal groups often face discrimination under local customs.

Successful Models

- **Goa's UCC:**
 - Based on the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867, it mandates equal property rights and registration of marriages.
 - Ensures gender equity and uniformity among all residents.
- **Uttarakhand's Initiative:**
 - The first Indian state to adopt UCC, covering marriage, inheritance, and live-in relationships while exempting Scheduled Tribes.

Thought Leaders and Judicial Perspectives

- **B.R. Ambedkar:** Advocated for legislative reforms to address social inequalities in personal laws.

- **K.M. Munshi:** Highlighted UCC's role in fostering national integration and modernization.
- **Judicial Observations:**
 - *Jose Paulo Coutinho v. Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira (2019):* Supreme Court praised Goa's UCC and urged nationwide implementation.
- **Law Commission (2018):** Declared UCC neither essential nor feasible at the time, citing India's pluralistic ethos.

Key Challenges

- **Religious Sensitivities:** Perceived threat to religious autonomy and practices.
 - *Example:* Strong opposition from sections of the Muslim community regarding personal law reforms.
- **Cultural Diversity:** India's vast social and regional differences make standardization difficult.
 - *Example:* Variations in property rights within Hindu communities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- **Political Concerns:** Allegations of using UCC for electoral gains.
 - *Example:* UCC discussions often intensify around election periods.
- **Legal Complexities:** Ambiguities in integrating UCC with existing tribal and customary laws.
 - *Example:* Debates on protecting tribal traditions while ensuring uniformity.
- **Public Misconceptions:** Lack of awareness about UCC's benefits and objectives.
 - *Example:* Misinterpretations leading to protests in states like Manipur.

Way Forward

- **Collaborative Approach:** Involve all stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, in consensus-building.
- **Gradual Implementation:** Start with universally accepted areas such as marriage and inheritance.
- **Public Education:** Launch awareness campaigns to dispel myths and highlight UCC's advantages.

- **Preserve Constitutional Rights:** Ensure that UCC aligns with fundamental rights like religious freedom under Article 25.
- **Robust Legal Mechanisms:** Develop frameworks to address conflicts and accommodate regional diversities.

Conclusion

- The UCC embodies the ideals of equality, secularism, and social justice envisioned in the Constitution.
- As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar aptly remarked, “Reforming our social systems is key to eliminating inequities and inequalities.”
- Sensitivity, inclusivity, and phased implementation are crucial for realizing the vision of a unified and equitable legal system.

Joint Parliamentary Committee

Syllabus: GS-2: Parliamentary committees.

Context:

- One Nation One Election Bill referred at Lok Sabha to joint parliamentary committee.

Background

- **Bills Introduced:**
 - Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill.
 - Union Territories Amendment Bill.
- **Objective:** Implementation of simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **Introduced By:** Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal in the Lok Sabha.
- **Vote Outcome:**
 - **In Favor:** 263 MPs.
 - **Against:** 198 MPs.

Key Features of the Bills

- **Union Territories Amendment Bill:** Aligns elections in Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu & Kashmir with Lok Sabha elections.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:**
 - No tampering with judicial review, federal character, or supremacy of the Constitution.
 - Principles of Basic Structure remain intact, as per the Law Minister.

Government's Stand

- **Law Minister's Assurance:** The Bills do not undermine State powers or the Basic Structure.
- **Prime Minister's Role:** Advocated for referral of the Bills to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for wider deliberations.
- **Future Steps:**
 - JPC discussions.
 - Cabinet approval of the JPC report.
 - Further debates in Parliament.

Opposition's Criticism

- **Violation of Federalism:**
 - States are separate and equal constituents under the Constitution (Manish Tewari, Congress).
 - Bills allegedly subordinate State legislatures to Parliament.
- **Concerns Over Autonomy:**
 - State Assembly autonomy perceived as diminished.
 - The move undermines the mandate of the State electorate.
- **Allegations of Presidential Democracy:**
 - Asaduddin Owaisi (AIMIM) claimed Bills indirectly introduce a Presidential form of governance.
- **Concerns About Election Commission:**

- Bills allegedly give excessive powers to the Election Commission (Gaurav Gogoi, Congress).

Other Opposition Voices

- **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK):** Right to elect a government for five years cannot be curtailed.
- **Trinamool Congress:** Criticized as fulfilling a single leader's vision.
- **Samajwadi Party:** Feared loss of States' diversity and plurality.
- **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP):** Called for a JPC referral or withdrawal of the Bills.

Procedural and Political Aspects

- **First Use of E-Voting in New Parliament:**
 - 369 MPs voted electronically; 92 cast manual slips.
- **Two-Thirds Majority Requirement:**
 - Passage of a Constitutional Amendment requires more than 307 votes of the 461 present MPs.
 - Opposition asserted government lacks this majority (Shashi Tharoor, Congress).

Conclusion

- The Bills represent a significant constitutional reform initiative with extensive political and procedural debates.
- Further deliberations in the JPC and Parliament will shape their trajectory.

Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

Definition

- A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is a special committee constituted by the Indian Parliament, comprising members from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, to investigate specific issues or examine bills.

Constitution

- Formed by a motion passed in one house and agreed to by the other.

- The number of members and their composition is determined based on the motion.

What is JPC?

Purpose

- **Investigative Role**
 - Probing significant issues or controversies.
 - Examples: JPC on Bofors Scandal (1987), Harshad Mehta Scam (1992).
- **Legislative Role**
 - Examining specific bills in detail for better scrutiny.

Composition

- Members from both houses, with representation proportional to party strength.

Powers

- Similar to Parliamentary Committees:
 - Summoning individuals and documents.
 - Cross-examining witnesses.
 - Making recommendations.

Reports

- Non-binding but influential; used for legislative or administrative reforms.

Significance

- Enhances accountability and transparency.
- Ensures thorough investigation of complex matters.
- Provides detailed scrutiny beyond the routine debates in Parliament.

Limitations

- Recommendations are not binding.
- May face delays or political influence.

Key Examples of JPCs

- **Bofors Scandal (1987):** Investigated allegations of corruption in defense deals.
- **Harshad Mehta Scam (1992):** Probed stock market irregularities.

- **2G Spectrum Case (2011):** Investigated alleged irregularities in spectrum allocation.

Radhakrishnan panel

Syllabus: GS-2: Social Sector – Education.

Context:

- A high-level committee of experts, headed by former chairperson of the Indian Space Research Organisation K. Radhakrishnan, has recommended restructuring of the National Testing Agency (NTA).

Key Reasons for Restructuring

- Complaints of question paper leaks in Common University Entrance Test-Undergraduate (CUET-UG).
- Need for a robust and foolproof examination system.

Major Recommendations by the Panel

1. Implementation of Digi-Exam System

- Modeled after Digi-Yatra for secure and authenticated examination processes.
- Ensures authentication at all stages:
 - **Application stage**
 - **Test administration**
 - **Admission/induction**
 - **Study/work phase**

2. Governance and Leadership

- Creation of an **empowered and accountable governing body** with three designated sub-committees:
 - Test Audit, Ethics, and Transparency
 - Nomination and Staff Conditions
 - Stakeholder Relationships

- Leadership team to comprise domain experts with proven experience and skills.
- Appointment of a **Director General** (rank: Additional Secretary under Central Staffing Scheme).
- Establishment of **10 verticals**, each led by a Director-level officer.

3. Core Focus of NTA

- NTA to primarily focus on conducting **entrance examinations for higher education**.
- Expansion to other exams only after building sufficient capacity.

4. Strengthening Institutional Linkages

- Institutional linkage with State/District authorities for secure test administration.
- Creation of **Coordination Committees** at State and District levels with defined roles and responsibilities.

5. Policy Interventions for Test Administration

- Introduction of:
 - **Multi-session testing**
 - **Multi-stage testing** (specific to NEET-UG)
 - Accommodation of multiple subject streams for CUET admission tests.
- Establishment of well-documented and transparent parameters for **normalization** in multi-session tests.

6. Ensuring Security and Transparency

- Recommendations include measures for:
 - Setting question papers and secure printing.
 - Transportation and handling of question papers and OMR sheets.
 - Selection and monitoring of testing centers.
 - Frisking and prevention of impersonation.
 - Proper handling of unused materials and results declaration.

Government's Plans for NTA

- **2025 Restructuring:** Introduction of new posts and reforms in test processes.

- NTA to conduct only **entrance exams for higher education** starting 2024.
- Recruitment exams to be excluded from NTA's scope.
- **CUET-UG to remain annual.**

Significance

- Aims to enhance the reliability and transparency of entrance examinations.
- Promotes fair and standardized testing mechanisms.
- Strengthens institutional collaboration at multiple administrative levels.

Way Forward

- Ensure timely implementation of the restructuring process by 2025.
- Monitor effectiveness of Digi-Exam and proposed reforms.
- Address stakeholder concerns for seamless coordination.

U.S. Federal Reserve Rate Cut

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy

Context:

- The Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced a quarter-point (25 bps) cut to its key interest rate. This was the third rate cut by the Fed of 2024. The latest rate cut reduces the Fed's target rate to between 4.25% and 4.5%.

Key Highlights of the US Fed Rate Cut Decision

- The Federal Reserve announced a **25 bps rate cut**, lowering its target rate to **4.25%–4.5%**.
- This marks the **third rate cut in 2024**.
- **Market Reaction in the US:**
 - **Negative response:** Wall Street indices closed sharply lower.
 - **Indices Performance:**
 - Dow Jones: **-1123.03 points (-2.58%)** to **42,326.87**.
 - Nasdaq Composite: **-3.56%**.

- S&P 500: **-2.95%**.
- **Dollar Impact:** The US dollar surged to a **two-year high**.
- **Treasury Yields:** Experienced a sharp rise.
- The Federal Reserve indicated **only two rate cuts in 2025**, revising the earlier projection of four, contributing to market pessimism.

Immediate Impact on Indian Markets

- **Indian Stock Market Outlook:**
 - **Gift Nifty:** Trading below **24,000** (quoted at **24,930**) at 8 AM.
 - Indicates a **gap-down start** for domestic equity markets.
- **Asian Markets:**
 - Mirrored Wall Street's decline:
 - Japan's Nikkei 225: **-1%**.
 - Australia's ASX: **-1.9%**.
 - Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index: **-1%**.

Impact of U.S. Federal Reserve Rate Cut on Indian Economy

Positive Impacts

- **Increased Foreign Portfolio Investments (FPI):**
 - Lower returns in the U.S. encourage investors to redirect funds to emerging markets like India for better yields.
 - Boosts capital inflows, strengthening India's stock markets.
- **Rupee Appreciation:**
 - Increased dollar inflows lead to rupee appreciation, reducing import costs (e.g., crude oil).
- **Lower Borrowing Costs:**
 - Easier global liquidity conditions can lead to reduced interest rates for Indian firms borrowing abroad.
- **Boost to Exports:**

- Increased global liquidity can spur demand for Indian exports, particularly IT and pharma sectors.

Negative Impacts

➤ **Pressure on Export Competitiveness:**

- Rupee appreciation makes Indian exports relatively expensive, potentially reducing competitiveness.

➤ **Volatility in Capital Flows:**

- Short-term hot money inflows could create volatility in financial markets.

➤ **Inflationary Pressures:**

- Excessive inflows and liquidity might lead to inflationary trends in the domestic economy.

➤ **Impact on Trade Deficit:**

- A stronger rupee could widen the trade deficit by making imports cheaper and exports less attractive.

Overall Implications

- **Short-Term Gains:** Capital inflows, market buoyancy, and reduced import bills.
- **Long-Term Challenges:** Managing capital flow volatility, inflation, and export competitiveness.

Way Forward

- Strengthen domestic economic fundamentals to absorb capital inflows effectively.
- Focus on policies that ensure export competitiveness amid currency appreciation.

Agri-carbon market

Syllabus: GS-3: Sustainable agriculture.

Context:

- In India, existing carbon credit projects listed under non-governmental entities need to be examined to ensure inclusivity and efficiency.

Agri-Carbon Market

- The agri-carbon market refers to a trading system where farmers, agricultural entities, or landowners earn credits by adopting sustainable agricultural practices that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or sequester carbon in the soil.
- These credits can then be sold to companies or organizations aiming to offset their carbon emissions.

Introduction

- **Potential:** Carbon markets can transform Indian agriculture by:
 - Promoting sustainable farming practices.
 - Offering financial opportunities for farmers.
 - Contributing to climate change mitigation.
- **Carbon Pricing:** A key tool for mitigating climate change, functioning through:
 - **Compliance Markets:**
 - Regulated by governments or international bodies (e.g., UN).
 - Imposes emission caps on businesses; excess emissions require purchasing carbon credits or paying carbon taxes.
 - **Voluntary Carbon Markets:**
 - Operates without regulation.
 - Organizations trade carbon credits through mechanisms like Clean Development Mechanism, Verra, and Gold Standard.

Carbon Markets: Working Mechanism

- **Global and Indian Initiatives:**
 - **COP29 (2024):** Centralized UN carbon market approved.
 - **India's Plans:**
 - Announcement of compliance and voluntary carbon markets.
 - NABARD, ICAR, and State universities listed five agriculture carbon credit projects in Verra.
- **Principles:**
 - **Additionality:** Ensures carbon credits lead to new emission reductions.

- **Permanence:** Long-term durability of benefits (e.g., soil carbon retention).

Current Status of Carbon Farming in India

➤ **Projects:**

- Over 50 agriculture carbon farming projects listed in Verra, targeting 1.6 million hectares.
- Aim: Generate ~4.7 million carbon credits annually, offsetting GHG emissions equivalent to 11 billion miles driven by gasoline vehicles.
- Status: No registered projects; no carbon credits issued or payments made to farmers.

Challenges in Carbon Farming Projects

➤ **Inclusiveness:**

- Marginalized communities and women are underrepresented.
- Land distribution disparity: Non-marginalized castes own more land in carbon farming projects.

➤ **Implementation Issues:**

- 45% of farmers reported lack of communication.
- Over 60% lacked training in new techniques.
- 28% stopped sustainable practices due to insufficient financial incentives.
- 99% had not received carbon credit payments.

➤ **Performance Comparison:**

- Startups focused solely on carbon credits performed better than subsidiaries of larger corporations but lacked inclusivity.

Steps to Improve Carbon Markets in India

➤ **Social Inclusion:**

- Offer higher prices for credits from projects involving smallholders and marginalized communities.

➤ **Capacity Building:**

- Enhance communication and provide regular training.
- Ensure timely and guaranteed payments to farmers.

➤ **Collaboration:**

- Partner with national and international research institutions to:
 - Identify suitable regions and interventions.
 - Prevent yield penalties.
 - Protect food security.

Future Prospects

➤ **Technological Advancements:**

- Improved measurement of soil carbon and GHG emissions using:
 - Remote sensing, satellite imagery, drones, and sensors.

➤ **Implementation Focus:**

- Addressing old challenges remains critical for success.
- Building a robust agricultural carbon market requires cooperation among policymakers, researchers, and private entities.

Conclusion

A well-implemented carbon market can boost sustainable agriculture, enhance farmer income, and contribute to India's climate goals, provided inclusivity, transparency, and timely rewards are ensured.