BYJU'S EXAM PREP | IAS

June 2022

UPSC MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Reforms in India's higher judiciary

Improving the functioning of the judiciary

India's near-term economic challenges
Balancing between growth momentum and fiscal deficit targets

Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
Countering China's Belt and Road Initiative

Payments for Ecosystem Services
Mobilizing climate finance

Community-oriented health services
People-centric primary healthcare service

Outstanding performance by BYJU'S students in IAS 2021

Congratulations to our toppers

03 Ranks in **Top 10** | **12** Ranks in **Top 25** | **25** Ranks in **Top 50**

RANK 01

Shruti Sharma

RANK 5

Utkarsh Dwivedi

RANK 6

Yaksh Chaudhary

RANK 12

Yasharth Shekhar

RANK 13

Priyamvada Mhaddalkar

RANK 14

Abhinav Jain

RANK 15

Challapalle Yaswanthkumarreddy

RANK 16

Anshu Priya

RANK 19

Diksha Joshi

RANK 20

Arpit Chauhan

RANK 21

Dilip Kainikkara

RANK 25

Shruti Rajiakshmi

RANK 29

Bhavishya

RANK 31

Avinash V

RANK 33

Jaspinder Singh

RANK 35

Kartikeya Jaiswal

RANK 37

V Sanjana Simha

RANK 40

Kushal Jain

RANK 44

Anjali Shrotriya

RANK 47

Naman Kumar Singla

RANK 50

Abhijit Ray

Outstanding performance by BYJU'S students in IAS 2020

Congratulations to our toppers

02 Ranks in **Top 10** | **18** Ranks in **Top 50** | **36** Ranks in **Top 100**

RANK 02
Jagrati Awasthi

RANK 8
Kartik Jivani

RANK 13
Gaurav Budania

RANK 14
Karishma Nair

RANK 17
Sarthak Agarwal

RANK 25
Vaibhav Rawat

RANK 26
Pulkit Singh

RANK 28
Divya Mishra

RANK 30
Divyanshu Choudhary

RANK 31
Megha Swaroop

RANK 32
Rallapalli Jagat Sai

RANK 35
Aparna Ramesh

RANK 37
Narwade Vinayak

RANK 38
Varuna Agarwal

RANK 41
Aswathy Jiji

RANK 42
Pooja Gupta

RANK 46
Jubin Mohapatra

RANK 50
Abhishek Shukla

Incredible Results

CSE 2019

4 Ranks in top 10 | **13 Ranks** in top 50 | **22 Ranks** in top 100

Rank 3
Pratibha Verma

Rank 6
Vishakha Yadav

Rank 8
Abhishek Saraf

Rank 10
Sanjita Mohapatra

CSE 2018

11 Ranks in top 50 | **28 Ranks** in top 100 | **183 Ranks** in the final list

Rank 11
Pujya Priyadarshni

Rank 16
Dhodmise Trupti Ankush

Rank 21
Rahul Jain

Rank 24
Anuraj Jain

Rank 31
Mainak Ghosh

CSE 2017

5 Ranks in top 50 | **34 Ranks** in top 100 | **236 Ranks** in the final list

Rank 3
Sachin Gupta

Rank 6
Koya Sree Harsha

Rank 8
Anubhav Singh

Rank 9
Soumya Sharma

Rank 10
Abhishek Surana

CSE 2016

8 Ranks in top 50 | **18 Ranks** in top 100 | **215 Ranks** in the final list

Rank 2
Anmol Sher Singh Bedi

Rank 5
Abhilash Mishra

Rank 12
Tejaswi Rana

Rank 30
Prabhash Kumar

Rank 32
Avdhesh Meena

CSE 2015

5 Ranks in top 50 | **14 Ranks** in top 100 | **162 Ranks** in the final list

Rank 20
Vipin Garg

Rank 24
Khumanthem Diana Devi

Rank 25
Chandra Mohan Garg

Rank 27
Pulkit Garg

Rank 47
Anshul Agarwal

CSE 2014

6 Ranks in top 50 | **12 Ranks** in top 100 | **83 Ranks** overall selections

Rank 4
Vandana Rao

Rank 5
Suharsha Bhagat

Rank 16
Ananya Das

Rank 23
Anil Dhameliya

Rank 28
Kushaal Yadav

Rank 39
Vivekanand T.S

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Slots	Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3	Batch 4	Batch 5	Batch 6	Batch 7
1st Feb to 7th March, 2022	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture						
8th March to 11th April, 2022	Geography	Geography					
12th April to 16th May, 2022	Economics	Economics	Economics				
17th May to 17th June, 2022	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India			
20th June to 21st July, 2022	Polity	Polity	Polity	Polity	Polity		
22nd July to 26th August, 2022	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Geography	Geography	Geography	Geography	
29th August to 30th September, 2022	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	Economics	Economics	Economics	Economics
3rd October to 7th November, 2022	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India
9th November to 12th December, 2022	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Polity	Polity
13th December to 13th January, 2023	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Geography
16th January to 16th February, 2023		Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture
17th February to 22nd March, 2023			Focus Prelims	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History
23th March to 25th April, 2023			Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management
26th April to 30th May, 2023			Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Internal Security + CSAT
31st May to 11th June, 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023
12th June to 14th July, 2023			Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance
17th July to 18th August, 2023						Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper
1st September to 30th September, 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023

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Slots	Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3	Batch 4	Batch 5	Batch 6	Batch 7
1st Feb to 7th March, 2022	Economics						
8th March to 11th April, 2022	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India					
12th April to 16th May, 2022	Polity	Polity	Polity				
17th May to 17th June, 2022	Geography	Geography	Geography	Geography			
20th June to 21st July, 2022	International Relations + World History	Economics	Economics	Economics	Economics		
22nd July to 26th August, 2022	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	Modern History + Post Independent India	
29th August to 30th September, 2022	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Polity	Polity	Polity	Polity
3rd October to 7th November, 2022	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Geography	Geography	Geography
9th November to 12th December, 2022	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Economics
13th December to 13th January, 2023	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Modern History + Post Independent India
16th January to 16th February, 2023		International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History
17th February to 22nd March, 2023			Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management
23th March to 25th April, 2023				Focus Prelims	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT
26th April to 30th May, 2023				Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture
31st May to 11th June, 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023
12th June to 14th July, 2023				Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance
17th July to 18th August, 2023							Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper
1st September to 30th September, 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023

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Sunday - 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM

Slots	Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3	Batch 4	Batch 5
February (05, 06, 12, 13, 19, 20, 26 & 27) + March (05, 06 & 12)	Polity				
March (13, 19, 20, 26 & 27) + April (02, 03, 09, 10, 16 & 17)	Economics	Economics			
April (23, 24 & 30) + May (01, 07, 08, 14, 15, 21, 22 & 28)	Modern History + Post Independent	Modern History + Post Independent	Modern History + Post Independent		
May (29) + June (04, 05, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25 & 26) + July (02 & 03)	Geography	Geography	Geography	Geography	
July (10, 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 & 31) + August (06, 07, 13 & 14)	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Polity	Polity	Polity	Polity
August (20, 21, 27 & 28) + September (03, 04, 10, 11, 17, 18 & 24)	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	Economics	Economics	Economics
September (25) + October (01, 02, 08, 09, 15, 16, 22, 23, 29 & 30)	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Modern History + Post Independent	Modern History + Post Independent
November (05, 06, 12, 13, 19, 20, 26, 27) + December (03, 04 & 10)	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper	Geography
December (11, 17, 18, 24 & 31) + January '23 (07, 08, 14, 15, 21 & 22)	Ethics + Governance	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT	Internal Security + CSAT
January '23 (28 & 29) + February '23 (04, 05, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25 & 26) + March ' 23 (04)	Internal Security + CSAT	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture	Ancient India + Medieval India + Art & Culture
March '23 (05, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25 & 26) + April '23 (01, 02, 08 & 09)	Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History	International Relations + World History
April '23 (15,16,23,29 & 30) + May '23 (06,07,13,14,20 & 21)		Focus Prelims	Focus Prelims	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management	Environment & Ecology + Science & Technology + Disaster Management
May '23 (27 & 28) + June '23 (17, 18, 24 & 25) + July (01, 02, 08, 09 & 15)		Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance	Ethics + Governance
31st May to 11th June, 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023	PRELIMS 2023
July '23 (16, 22, 23, 29 & 30) + Aug '23 (05, 06, 12, 13, 19 & 20)					Social Issues & Social Justice + Essay + Compulsory Language Paper
1st September to 30th September, 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023	MAIN 2023

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POLITY

Structure, Organization and Functioning of the Judiciary

1. Reforms in India's higher judiciary

» Prelims: Related Constitutional articles

» Mains: Recommendations for reforms in the organization and functioning of the higher judiciary

Context:

- Amid talks of proposals for increasing the age of retirement of Supreme Court of India judges from the current 65 years to 67 years, the article examines some aspects relating to the retirement age of judges and other areas in need of reform in the functioning of the Indian judiciary and makes certain recommendations in this direction.

Recommendations:

Addressing the disparity in the retirement ages of High Court and Supreme Court judges:

- Currently, the retirement age for High Court judges is 62, while for Supreme Court judges it is 65. The article argues for doing away with this difference and bases its arguments on the following aspects.
    * Increasing the age of retirement of High Court judges will ensure the availability of judges in the High Court for a longer period and thus it will help alleviate the low number of judges problem in the judiciary to some extent.
    * A notable negative fallout of the differential retirement age between the High Court and Supreme Court Judges is that it results in intense pressure and competition among the High Court Judges to make it to the Supreme Court. Doing away with the differential retirement age will let the High Court judges concentrate on their work.
    * Doing away with the differential retirement age would incentivize several capable judges to remain back in the High Courts and carry on the good work in the High Courts. A capable and well-functioning High Court can help alleviate some case burdens from the Supreme Court.

After retirement work for the judges:

- After retirement, some of the Supreme Court judges are appointed to various constitutional posts and tribunals and commissions. While some get into arbitration, a very small number of judges devote themselves to public service.
- In this regard, the article calls for the creation of a cadre of public service for retired judges and recommends making appointments to the constitutional and statutory posts and special assignments from this.
- To incentivize the judges' enrollment, there is the need to ensure full pay and the facilities of a judge of the Supreme Court for life for such judges.
- Additionally, the judges should be barred from arbitrations given that there is an element of conflict of interest involved in this case. If outright banning is not legally possible, a system should be devised to disincentivize the retired judges from pursuing arbitration. Under such a system, if any judge is unwilling to be a part of the proposed cadre and instead wishes to pursue arbitrations post-retirement, then senior positions on the Supreme Court such as the membership of the collegium ought not to be available for them.

Selecting Chief Justice of India:

- The article recommends that the choice of the Chief Justice of India should be the best reputed Chief Justice of a High Court who has proved himself worthy both in judicial office as well as administrative leadership rather than having a sitting Supreme Court elevated to that position. Having such a system in place will help ensure that the judges of the Supreme Court are not swayed by their aspirations to the office of CJI and are not influenced in their judgments.
    * Notably, though it is generally assumed that the senior most judge of the Supreme Court should be the Chief Justice of India, the Constitution mandates no such thing.
    * This kind of system is also observed in the U S. wherein only five of its 17 Chief Justices served earlier as an Associate Justice, while the rest came fresh to the Court. Such a system will help relieve excessive power and pressure.
- Also, the appointee should have a clear three-year term rather than a very short span, to ensure that he/she has sufficient time in the position to contribute.

Functioning of the Chief Justice of India:

- Recently, many CJIs are having their unfettered way in critical decision-making with respect to the functioning of the Supreme Court. In this context, the article suggests that the CJI must not be allowed to function as the primus super pares.
    * Primus inter pares is a Latin phrase meaning first among equals. It is typically used as an honorary title for someone who is formally equal to other members of their group but is accorded unofficial respect, traditionally owing to their seniority in office.
- The CJI should instead function in a true collegiate manner with regard to the roster of allotment of cases and appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts and other important matters of judicial and administrative importance.

Nut Graf

Judicial reforms in the selection process of the Chief Justice of India by expanding the pool for consideration beyond the Supreme Court judges and doing away with the basis of seniority along with reforms in the functioning of the CJI in a true collegiate manner and regulating their after-retirement work can help in improving the functioning of the judiciary.

Indian Constitution— Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

2. Applicability of international legal obligations on domestic laws

» Prelims: Article 253 of the Indian Constitution

» Mains: Concept of dualist and monism state

Context:

- In the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations for a proposed international treaty on combating cybercrime, India has submitted for criminalising "offensive messages". Notably, the submission made by India has provisions similar to that noted in Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000. This is being described as a possible attempt to get back Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 which was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2015 in the Shreya Singhal v. Union of India case for having a "chilling effect on free speech" and being against the fundamental right to free speech.

Dualist v/s Monism:

- India is a dualist state.
- Under a dualist model, there is a dichotomy between international legal obligations that states as sovereigns agree to recognize in their foreign relations, and domestic legal rules that are binding in internal relationships between the state and its citizens or subjects. This is different from monism wherein international law is automatically incorporated into the domestic legal system of the country even without supporting domestic legislation.
- Therefore, international law does not become a part of the domestic legal system in India unless it is specifically transformed into domestic law by Parliament.

Judiciary's approach on the issue:

- In recent times, the Supreme Court of India has moved away from the traditional dualist approach towards monism. In cases such as Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997), National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India (2014), and K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2018), the Judiciary has allowed for the incorporation of provisions of international law into domestic law in the absence of any specific provision in domestic laws.
- The Courts have indicated that they will respect international law unless it can be shown that it is inconsistent with municipal law.

Related constitutional provisions:

- Article 253 of the Indian Constitution allows for legislation for giving effect to international agreements. It states that the Parliament has the power to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention with any other country or countries or any decision made at any international conference, association or other body.

Nut Graf

An international law does not become a part of the domestic legal system in India unless it is specifically transformed into domestic law by Parliament and also such a provision must be able to stand the test of constitutionality by the Judiciary.

Important/recent Supreme Court judgments/ directives

3. Allahabad High Court directives with respect to Section 498A of the IPC

» Prelims: Section 498A of IPC

Context:

- Allahabad High Court has come up with a slew of directives in view of the allegations of misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
  * Section 498A of the IPC notes that whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

Details:

- The Allahabad High Court has proposed certain safeguards to avoid the misuse of Section 498A of IPC. It includes the following.
  * The High Court has directed the police not to arrest the accused in a dowry case till the conclusion of the "cooling period" which the high court has fixed for two months from the registration of the First Information Report [FIR].
    » The Indian Penal Code or the Criminal Procedure Code does not have any provision for a cooling period.
  * Every complaint or application under Section 498A IPC and other allied sections would be immediately referred to the Family Welfare Committee (FWC) to be set up in each district by the concerned Magistrate.

» Only those cases would be transmitted to FWC in which Section 498-A IPC along with no injury- Section 307 (attempt to murder) and other sections of the IPC in which the imprisonment is less than 10 years.

* After receiving the complaint, the Committee shall summon the contesting parties and would try to settle the matrimonial dispute within a period of two months from its lodging.

* Also, the Committee, after having proper deliberations, would prepare a detailed report and would refer to the concerned Magistrate/ police authorities by inserting all factual aspects and their opinion on the matter.

Concerns with the judgment:

- The Allahabad High Court's directions though noble in intent seem to be flawed.

Against the previous Supreme Court observations:

- Notably, the Supreme Court in the Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar vs Union of India (2018) case had held the constitution of similar committees and an embargo on arrest by the police impermissible under the scheme of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).
- A similar opinion was also expressed by the Supreme Court in the Rajesh Sharma vs The State of U.P., 2017 case as well.

Watering down of provisions:

- Notably, the court's directive in the concerned case waters down the directives laid down in the Rajesh Sharma case. Notably, if a woman's bone is fractured or permanent privation is caused to any eye or ear or a joint by her husband during the course of a matrimonial fight, the police shall be able to effect arrest, as the maximum imprisonment prescribed in such cases of grievous hurt is seven years.
- Also, the cooling period has been increased from the previous one month (as per the Rajesh Sharma case) to two months as per the new directives. This increases the risk of repeat offences during the cooling period.
- There are concerns that these directions might curtail the rights of a genuine victim of dowry harassment.

Overstepping of jurisdiction by the judiciary:

- There are questions on whether these directives amount to the High Court overstepping its jurisdiction given that there is already a clearly laid out scheme of investigation under the CrPC and there is no ambiguity about or gaps in the law on arrest which warranted an interpretation by the judiciary.
- Notably, the constitutionality of dowry provisions has already been established and upheld by the judiciary. The misuse of Section 498A IPC by itself cannot be a ground to dilute it and issue directions which do not flow from any provision of the Code. This would come under the domain of the legislature.
- Also, the Family Welfare Committee, being a third agency might not be the right body to deal with dowry cases and more so in stalling arrest till a report is submitted by the committee.

Recommendations:

- Given the concerns associated with the recent directives, the article makes some recommendations to balance the need to have strict anti-dowry provisions while also avoiding the misuse of the dowry law provisions.

Enforcing the court directions in the Arnesh Kumar case:

- The police must ensure that there is sufficient reason and credible material against the accused person to necessitate arrest.
- Educating and training of the investigating officers on the principles laid down by the Judiciary in the Arnesh Kumar case should be ensured with a strict accountability mechanism in the police force.

Changes in Section 498A:

- The legislature should consider making Section 498A of the IPC bailable.
- Also, the legislature may consider amending and making the offence under Section 498A IPC compoundable so that a compromise could be arrived at with or without the permission of the competent court. This will not only save cost to the parties in dispute but also the judiciary's valuable time.

Provide scope for mediation:

- The upcoming mediation bill of 2021 should provide for an institutional mediation mechanism to help in settling the matrimonial dispute through the civil route.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *Though any attempt to avoid the misuse of existing laws is welcome it cannot be at the cost of comprising or curtailing the rights of genuine victims. Also, it would be best to have any such interventions being led by the legislature rather than the judiciary to ensure a strict separation of powers.*

Important Supreme Court Verdicts

4. Supreme Court verdict in the Perarivalan case

» Prelims: Article 142, Article 161, Article 245

» Mains: Transparency and accountability of the important institutions

Background:

- The Supreme Court has ordered the release of A. G. Perarivalan, one of the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, exercising its special powers under Article 142 of the Constitution.
- The apex court was of the view that the inordinate delay in deciding Perarivalan's early release plea by the Governor under Article 161 warranted his release.
- Perarivalan was arrested on June 11, 1991, at the age of 19, weeks after former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a suicide bomb attack at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu on May 21.

What are Article 142 and Article 161?

- Article 142 provides that the Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it.
- Article 161 talks about the power of the State Governor to grant pardons, etc., and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.

Articles and Issues:

- The State Cabinet decided to accept his remission plea and accordingly forwarded its recommendation to the Governor. Thereafter, the Governor had kept the plea in abeyance for quite some time.
- The Bench asked the Governor to decide within a week's time but, considering the President to be the competent authority to decide on the plea, the Governor had referred the recommendation of the Cabinet to him.
- The court dismissed the argument that the President exclusively, and not the Governor, had the power to grant pardon in a case under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code, saying this contention would render Article 161 a "dead-letter" and create an extraordinary situation whereby pardons granted by Governors in murder cases for the past 70 years would be rendered invalid.
- The court protected federalism by holding that States had the power to advise and aid the Governor in case of pleas of pardon under Article 161 made by convicts in murder cases.

A deeper examination is needed:

The case requires a deeper investigation due to the following reasons:

Subject matter not clear:

- The subject matter of Article 161 with respect to the exercise of power by the state governor is not clear and obvious as ruled by the Bench of the apex court.

Powers of the state:

- Under Section 432 in the code of criminal procedures, when any person has been sentenced to punishment for an offense, the appropriate Government may, at any time, without conditions or upon any conditions which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he has been sentenced.
- When the state can use this power then why it has gone with Article 161 to grant the release. This issue requires a complete constitutional clarification.

Delay by the Governor:

- There was a lot of delay from the Governor's side in taking the decision on the matter and the Supreme Court does not provide any time frame for the Governor to act on the issue.

Conclusion:

- The constitutional clarity on the issues is necessary and hence, a deeper investigation is required.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *Recently, the Bench of the Supreme Court ordered the release of Perarivalan who was one of the convicts of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. This was done by revoking Article 142 which flagged the concerns. Some hailed this decision while some required clarity on the verdict.*

Important Supreme Court Judgments

5. Reforming death penalty sentencing

» Prelims: Bachan Singh case

Context:

- The Supreme Court's recent judgment in Manoj and Ors. vs State of Madhya Pradesh.

Background:

- There have been growing concerns over the fairness of administering the death penalty in India which has also been acknowledged by the judgments of the Supreme Court of India, by former judges, lawyers, researchers, etc.
- The arbitrariness in death penalty sentencing procedures by the lower courts remains a major concern. The guidelines as set forth in previous landmark SC judgements like the Bachan Singh case are often ignored and not adhered to.
    * The constitutionality of the death penalty was upheld in 1980 in Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab. The judgment emphasised 'individualised sentencing' and called upon courts to consider

the 'crime' and the circumstances' of the accused for sentencing. These had to serve as mitigating factors.

Details:

- The Supreme Court in the "Manoj" case noted that very less relevant information about the accused is available and noted how this information is vital for a fair sentencing process.
- The Supreme Court also noted that information such as early family background that brings out any history of violence or neglect (also known as remote factors or experiences) is a relevant mitigating factor.

Significance of the judgment:

- The consideration of past social histories, behaviours and life circumstances of the accused will provide a comprehensive understanding of the accused. Thus, it would be an important step towards realising an 'individualised sentencing enquiry' as envisaged in the Bachan Singh case.
- The judgment indicates a shift towards an evidence-based inquiry, to sentencing that invites expert opinions and reports from a wide range of disciplines. This can help ensure just sentencing.
- The judgment expands the scope of mitigating factors by considering pre-offence details such as socio-economic status, education, family background and also post-offence details such as the conduct of the prisoner in prison. This will provide ample scope for mitigation of the death penalty sentencing.

Recommendations:

- Lower courts must be made to comply with the Supreme Court's decision in the 'Manoj' case.
- The lower courts should be equipped enough to understand the rich information that would be made available to them. They can take the help of non-legal expertise into courtrooms.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *The decision in the Manoj case is indeed a positive step towards a more meaningful and informed death penalty sentencing inquiry.*

Structure, Organisation and Functioning of the Executive

6. Zonal Councils

» Prelims: Zonal Councils

» Mains: Increasing centre-state and state to state level coordination and collaboration

Context:

- Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah recently presided over the 25th meeting of Western Zonal Council in Diu.

Zonal Councils:

- The Zonal Councils were established under the States Reorganisation Act in 1956 and hence are statutory bodies.
- The present composition of each of the Zonal Councils is as under:
- The Northern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh;
- The Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh;
- The Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Sikkim and West Bengal;
- The Western Zonal Council, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli; and
- The Southern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya and (vii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.
- The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- The Zonal Councils provide the platform to foster collaboration through a structured mechanism for dialogue and discussion on a continuous basis on the issues affecting one or more States or between the Centre and the States.
- The Zonal Councils are advisory in character.

Indian Constitution — Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

7. Anti- defection law

» Prelims: Anti-defection law provisions

» Mains: Concerns associated with anti-defection law and recommendations

Context:

- Many ruling party legislators from the Shiv Sena political party from the state of Maharashtra have revolted against the leadership. There are indications of mass defection in the party.
- This political churn in Maharashtra has brought the focus upon the anti-defection law.

Anti-defection law:

- The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, popularly referred to as the 'Anti-Defection Law' was inserted by the 52nd Amendment (1985) to the Constitution.
- 'Defection' has been defined as, "to abandon a position or association, often to join an opposing group".
- The law contemplates two kinds of defection:
  * A member voluntarily giving up membership of the party on whose symbol he got elected
  * Member violating a whip issued by the party to vote in a particular way or to abstain from voting.
- Anti-defection law was introduced to ensure that a party member does not violate the mandate of the party and in case he/she does so, he/she will lose membership of the House. It was meant to curtail the menace of floor-crossing and toppling of elected regimes by engineering defections. Hence it sought for stability of governments.
- The decision on disqualification questions on the ground of defection is referred to the Speaker or the Chairman of the House, and his/her decision is final.
- All proceedings in relation to disqualification under this Schedule are considered to be proceedings in Parliament or the Legislature of a state as is the case.

Grounds for disqualification:

- If an elected member gives up his membership of a political party voluntarily.
- If he votes or abstains from voting in the House, contrary to any direction issued by his political party.
- If any member who is independently elected joins any party.
- If any nominated member joins any political party after the end of 6 months.

Concerns with the anti-defection law:

- **Antithetical to the principle of representative democracy:**
  * The anti-defection law by forcing the elected members to stand by the party line comes across as being against the principle of representative democracy. The provisions of the law prevent the members from representing the views of the people of their constituency and is also found to violate their freedom of expression.
- **Exceptions to application of anti-defection law:**
  * Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule provides for an exception to the application of anti-defection law for disqualification in case of a merger of one party with another.
  * As per this provision, a deemed merger is said to have occurred only if two-thirds of the party's total strength agrees to the merger. This paves the way for mass defections.
  * There are also concerns that this provision would be used to save the defectors from the anti-defection law.
- **Misuse of the provisions:**
  * Recent instances are indicative of the misuse of provisions by parties, legislators and Speakers to either evade the law against defection or to achieve partisan political ends.
  * The speaker has in many cases misused his/her powers with respect to the provisions of anti-defection law.
  * There have been recent episodes of members submitting resignation letters to escape disqualification proceedings.
- **Uncertainty around the law:**
  * A member using the 'voluntarily giving up membership' mode of defection has been a source of dispute and litigation.
  * The Supreme Court decisions on this aspect have not been conclusionary and there continues to remain scope for further dispute and litigation.

Recommendations:

- As the anti-defection law has failed to curtail defections and has been liable to misuse, there is a strong case to reform the anti-defection law.

- Redefining the merger clause, shifting the adjudicatory power from the Speaker to some other credible authority could be some of the important aspects to be considered for reforming the law.

Nut graf:

Given the increasing instances of the failure of anti-defection law to ensure the stability of the elected government and the misuse of provisions by parties, legislators and Speakers to evade the law, there is the need to reform the anti-defection law.

ECONOMY

Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

1. India's near-term economic challenges

» Prelims: Important economic terminologies – Fiscal deficit and Current account deficit

» Mains: Challenges to the Indian economy and recommendations

Context:

- Finance Ministry's monthly economic report.

Near-term challenges to the Indian economy:

- The report warns of near-term challenges in reining in inflation, managing fiscal deficit and current account deficit, sustaining economic growth and maintaining a fair value of the rupee.
  * The elevated global prices of crude and edible oil are contributing to high retail inflation in the economy. The effect of the summer heat wave on crop production has only added to this inflation pressure by resulting in a rise in food prices domestically.
  * The recent cut in excise duties on diesel and petrol to control inflation levels in the economy presents upside risks to the fiscal deficit as it will significantly decrease government revenue. The additional welfare and subsidy spending only has increased the pressure on the gross budget deficit.
  * An increase in the fiscal deficit may cause the current account deficit to widen, compounding the effect of costlier imports, and weakening the value of the rupee thereby further aggravating external imbalances and creating the risk of a cycle of wider deficits and a weaker currency.
  * The Indian economy which was under pressure due to the pandemic-induced disruption remains to face challenges to its growth due to global factors. The supply chain bottlenecks contributing to rising commodity prices and the faster than projected withdrawal of monetary accommodation remain major concerns for India. The quantitative tightening in advanced economies is leading to large outflows in Foreign Portfolio Investment from India. This is contributing to the risk of rupee depreciation.
  * The prospect of high inflation and low growth gives rise to possible concerns of stagflation. Stagflation is a situation in which the inflation rate is high, the economic growth rate slows, and unemployment remains steadily high.

India well placed to face the near-term challenges:

- The report notes that India is relatively better placed to meet the near-term challenges better as compared with other nations. It notes the following reasons for this.
  * Relatively better financial sector stability in the Indian economy.
  * The rapid vaccination of the population has enabled the economy to reopen faster.
  * India continues to be the quickest growing major economy in 2022-23. India's economy grew 8.7 per cent in the last fiscal year (2021-22), against a 6.6 per cent contraction in the previous year. This is being seen as indicative of post-pandemic economic recovery. The sustained growth in the agricultural sector and increasing investments along with the rise in exports seem to strengthen this argument.
  * India's medium-term growth prospects remain bright as pent-up capacity expansion in the private sector is expected to drive capital formation and employment generation in the coming decade.
  * The emphasis on capital expenditure will help provide much-needed impetus to economic growth and employment generation.

Recommendations:

- The report stresses the need to address the near-term challenges without sacrificing macroeconomic stability in India. It calls for prioritizing macroeconomic stability over near-term growth.
- The government should seek to control spending. This would require rationalising non-capex expenditure by the government. This will not only help the government protect growth-supportive capex but also help avoid fiscal slippages.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *There continue to remain multiple near-term challenges to the Indian economy which will require a fine balancing between maintaining growth momentum, keeping the fiscal deficit within budget and restraining inflation objectives through tactful policies.*

Issues relating to Mobilization of Resources, Growth and Development

2. El Salvador's Bitcoin bet

» Mains: Significance and concerns associated with cryptocurrencies

Context:

- The world's largest cryptocurrency, Bitcoin has witnessed a steep fall in its price from a record high of $69,000 in November 2021 to around $20,000 in the recent weeks.
- There has been a significant correction in the prices of Bitcoin in particular and cryptocurrencies in general. This has resulted in huge losses to investors around the world.

Background:

El Salvador's adoption of Bitcoin as official currency:

- The Central American country of El Salvador had adopted Bitcoin as an official currency in September 2021.
- Since then, the government of the country has been trying to encourage citizens to primarily use Bitcoin for their daily transactions. In a bid to encourage Bitcoin usage among the citizens, the government even came out with a payments wallet named Chivo which gave out free Bitcoins worth $30 on a one-time basis.
- The El Salvador government has also set up geothermal plants to power the Bitcoin mining facilities in the country.

Reasons for El Salvador's adoption of Bitcoin:

- El Salvador's public debt had risen to over 100% of its gross domestic product mostly owing to the mismanagement of public funds by the government. The government's efforts to raise money through government bonds or from international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to meet the government's spending needs had not fructified.
- In this context, most economics analysts believe that the decision to adopt Bitcoin as an official currency in El Salvador may have to do with the government's inability to borrow in U.S. dollars.
    - Notably, in 2001, El Salvador had adopted the U.S. dollar as its official currency. Since the adoption of Bitcoin as an official currency, currently, both Bitcoin and the U.S. dollar are being used as official currencies in El Salvador.
- Bitcoin offers a chance for the El Salvador government to cut down its reliance on the U.S. dollar to fund its domestic spending and repay its external debts.

Performance of Bitcoin in El Salvador:

- Most citizens of El Salvador have been reluctant to adopt Bitcoin as a medium of exchange or as a legal tender mainly because of the extreme price volatility in the price of Bitcoins. This becomes a big disincentive for people to adopt Bitcoin because there continues to remain large uncertainty on the value of Bitcoins in the future.

Concerns for El Salvador with the crash in Bitcoin value:

- El Salvador government's investment of over $100 million in Bitcoin has lost more than half of its value till date due to the crash.
- A crash in Bitcoin's price against the U.S. dollar means that the government will have to sell its Bitcoin for fewer dollars, thus affecting its capacity to repay dollar debt as well.

Nut Graf

The experience of El Salvador with respect to the adoption of cryptocurrency offers valuable insights for countries around the world including India on the future of cryptocurrencies. The volatility in prices of cryptocurrencies continues to remain a major concern for their widespread adoption.

Inclusive Growth and Issues arising from it.

3. Recognising the 'compulsory' woman worker

» Mains: Challenges faced by rural women workforce and recommendations

Context:

- Recently, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has reported that the labour participation rate of rural women stood at 9.92% in March 2022 compared to 67.24% for men.
- According to CMIE, the "dropping out" of women from the labour market is one of the main reasons for this large difference in labour participation rate between Rural women and men.

Challenges for rural women workforce:

Lack of fixed employment opportunities:

- Rural women have had to often look for different employment opportunities. While farm labour activities provide seasonal job opportunities, during the off-season period, rural women workers are pushed into looking for job opportunities in construction sites or work as migrant worker, or other odd jobs. Also, the mechanisation of agricultural operations has drastically decreased the number of workdays available to rural women workforce and pushed them into odd jobs.

Challenges in work:

- Work at Construction sites is mostly part time and needs migration from their villages. Also, since they have not been registered as construction workers they continue to remain ineligible for any legal benefits accruing to them from the Construction Workers' Welfare Board. Also women working in construction sites are paid less than men

Challenges in MGNREGA:

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offers work opportunities for rural workforce, but this too is plagued by some challenges.
- As against the guaranteed 100 days of work, there have been reports of work availability days being less than this mandated number of workdays.
- Women are having to undertake physically challenging work. There are reports of women workforce being under paid for not being able to complete the challenging physical work.
- Lack of basic facilities like creche facility, provision of drinking water at worksite remains a major challenge for rural women workforce.

Recommendations:

Providing minimum wage:

- Notably, the lack of fixed piece rates for women labour has resulted in the underpayment of women labourers in India. In this regard it is very important to ensure minimum living wages for women with piece rates fixed for different types of women's labour.

Financial support:

- Landless manual labourers in rural India especially women should be provided cash support like the one being provided for small farmers.

Improving work conditions:

- The schedule of rates for women at MGNREGA projects based on impossibly high productivity rates must be lowered and the work sites made more worker-friendly.

Data driven policies:

- There is the need for widespread surveys of poor rural women and how they spend their time, to unravel the plight of rural women workforce in India. This can provide valuable insights for making suitable laws and policies that address their issues.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *Rural women workforce faces several challenges, and the addressing of these challenges is important to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth and development.*

Infrastructure

4. Roll-out of 5G services in India

» Prelims: 5G technology

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given the go-ahead for the first auction of the radio spectrum to facilitate the roll-out of 5G telecommunication services in India and subsequently, the Department of Telecommunications has issued a notice detailing the specifics of the auction.

Significance:

- The speed with which the government has moved from the initial announcement in the Union Budget to the telecom regulator's recommendations, and finally notification of the auction — has been commendable.
- The fast adoption of 5G will allow India to be at the forefront in the adoption of the possibly transformative 5G technology.
- The 5G technology will help boost digital connectivity and can help improve the delivery of services such as mobile banking, online education and telemedicine.

Concerns:

- The setting of a high reserve price for the spectrum indicates the government's prioritization of revenue over the industry's long-term financial health. This is all the more worrisome given the financial stress that the sector is going through.
- Also given the relative infancy in 5G adoption even in advanced economies, the technology is yet some years away from scale-based economic viability. The market for 5G applications is relatively small.
- These two factors may lead to an ultra-cautious approach both to bidding for spectrum and in rolling out services.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *While the speed with which the government has moved from initial announcement to the notification for auction is laudable, the high reserve price and the relatively small market currently could undermine the largescale adoption of 5G technology.*

Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

5. Goods and Services Tax system

» Mains: Concerns with the current GST system and recommendations to improve it

Background:

- The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax system has been able to remove the barriers to free trade and economic growth and avenues for corruption as observed in the earlier regime of taxes and cesses.
- However, many proposed reforms in the GST system to streamline it are yet to materialize. The proposal to end the multiple slabs and bring in a single standard rate under the GST system made as back as December 2018 is yet to be realized.

Concerns with the current GST system:

Complex and confusing:

- The GST system is still a complicated tax regime with different slabs. It is not easy to comprehend or comply

with.

- Also, the addition of more categories every day and the need to categorize them under the differential tax slabs in the GST regime is open to interpretation, harassment and avoidable litigation. This goes against the spirit of improving the ease of doing business in India.

Higher taxes on some segments:

- The imposition of high GST rates (often referred to as 'Sin' taxes) in some areas is not in the interest of sustainable economic growth and development.
- The higher taxes on five-star hotels, automobiles, etc. fail to comprehend the effect that these segments could have on employment generation both direct and indirect and the economic ripple effect downstream, in a complex web of businesses that have symbiotic relationships.
- Hence such taxes might be contradictory to the government's policy of generating growth and creating jobs under 'Make in India'.
- A more moderate tax rate for these segments can spur their demand in the economy and result in a virtuous impact on economic growth and development.

Exemptions from GST:

- Some items continue to remain exempt from GST. Petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel are not under the purview of GST, but come under Central excise and State taxes.
- This is not in line with the principle of simplifying the tax system in India as these goods account for a substantial share of taxes in India.

Recommendation:

- The article calls for doing away with the multiple tax slabs and bringing in a single low tax regime along with a limited list of exempt items as observed in other countries with similar systems.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *A single low tax regime along with a limited list of exempt items under the GST system can help ensure better compliance, widen the tax net, improve ease of doing business, boost the economy, create jobs, increase tax collections, and reduce corruption.*

Issues relating to Mobilization of Resources, Growth and Development-Cryptocurrencies

6. Fall in value of cryptos

» Mains: Factors affecting the price of cryptocurrencies

Concerns:

- Bitcoin has witnessed a steep fall in its price from a record high of $69,000 in November 2021 to around $20,000 in recent weeks. There has been a significant correction in the prices of Bitcoin in particular and cryptocurrencies in general in the recent past. This has resulted in huge losses to investors around the world and has raised questions over the financial viability of such cryptocurrencies.
- In this context, the article analyzes the factors affecting the price volatility of cryptocurrencies.

Factors affecting the price of cryptocurrencies:

- Cryptocurrencies are basically a form of asset that allows people to keep their money outside the formal financial system and make it accessible so that it can be used anywhere in the world. Hence their prices which depend on the demand for them are open to the influence of many factors including changes in the global liquidity conditions.
- Most of the fluctuations in the price of Bitcoin are brought about by changes in the demand side as the asset's supply is almost stagnant or moves very slowly given the enormous cost of mining an additional Bitcoin.
- The boom in the price of crypto assets during the onset of the pandemic was because investors were looking to invest their funds in crypto assets in the absence of other reliable investment opportunities. With the pandemic slowing down and economies opening up, investors are looking to move their funds out of crypto assets into more profitable investment opportunities. This is leading to a decline in prices.
- Recently, there have been changes in the price of an important class of assets: government bonds issued by the governments of developed countries. The policy interest rates on these bonds have been rising in recent times. These are considered safer investment options and the higher interest rates on them are adding to the investors' interest in these assets. As a result, investors in crypto assets are shifting their investments out from crypto assets into government bonds. This has resulted in a fall in demand for crypto-assets and consequently has had a downward impact on the price of cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *Given the nature of crypto assets and the interconnectedness of financial markets at the global level, the price of crypto assets will continue to remain sensitive to changes in the global liquidity conditions.*

Government Budgeting

7. States, freebies and the costs of fiscal profligacy

» Prelims: Extra budgetary borrowings

» Mains- Concerns with freebie political culture and recommendations to curtail it.

Background:

- A growing number of political parties have resorted to a freebie political culture and have been successful in winning elections by building vote banks.
- This issue has been raised by senior bureaucrats at a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Concerns:

- The freebie culture brings with it the threat of serious financial unsustainability. This could push the state into unsustainable debt.
- There are also doubts over whether such populist expenditure amounts to the best possible use of public money and the opportunity costs of such expenditure. Such expenditure often comes at the cost of diversion of expenditure on physical capital, which can potentially improve growth and generate jobs.
- Despite some arguments that the State finances are in good health and are found to be in conformance to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) targets, this aspect is misleading since much of the borrowing that funds these freebies happens off-budget (extra-budgetary borrowings), hence remains concealed. This aspect has been also pointed out by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

Recommendations:

- There is a need to have institutional checks and balances to curtail the freebie culture. Given the limited role that the opposition can play in this regard, constitutional bodies like the CAG through its audits should be empowered to play a bigger role. In this regard, the article makes the following suggestions.
  * The FRBM Acts of the Centre as well as States need to be amended to ensure more transparent disclosure of their liabilities. The disclosure provision under the current FRBM provisions should be made extensive and should be expanded to cover all liabilities whose servicing obligation falls on the Budget or could potentially fall on the Budget, regardless of any other condition.
  * The Union government should consider imposing conditionalities on States on their borrowing regime. This should be based on well-defined and objective criteria lest this could lead to a political blame game between the centre and the states.
    » As per the provisions of the Indian Constitution, States are required to take the Centre's permission when they borrow.
  * To get states into following a financially sustainable expenditure, the Union government through the President might also consider using the weapon of imposing a financial emergency in any State if the financial stability of that state is threatened.
- Instead of spending public money on freebies, governments should ideally invest such money in physical and social infrastructure. Such expenditure will be able to create a virtuous cycle of higher growth and higher revenues in the future and such expenditure will pay back for itself unlike in the case of populist giveaways.

Nut Graf

The political freebie culture is not economically sustainable and all measures need to be taken to curtail it. In this regard, there is the need to have institutional checks such as a more transparent disclosure under the FRBM regime and an empowered Comptroller and Auditor General of India to curtail such tendencies.

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

8. Bad bank

» Prelims: What is a Bad bank?

» Mains: Need of 'bad bank' and its impact on credit flow in the economy

Context:

- The Finance Minister announced that the National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL) along with the India Debt Resolution Company (IDRCL) will take over the first set of bad loans from banks and try to resolve them.

What is a 'bad bank'?

- A bad bank is a financial entity set up to buy non-performing assets (NPAs), or bad loans, from banks.
- The aim of setting up a bad bank is to help ease the burden on banks by taking bad loans off their balance sheets and get them to lend again to customers without constraints.
- Pros of setting up a bad bank: It can help consolidate all bad loans of banks under a single exclusive entity.
- Cons of setting up a bad bank:
  * Many critics have pointed out several problems with the idea of a bad bank to deal with bad loans.
  * Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan has argued that a bad bank backed by the government will merely shift bad assets from the hands of public sector banks.
  * A mere transfer of assets from one pocket of the government to another will not necessarily lead to a successful resolution of these bad debts when the set of incentives facing these entities is essentially the same.

* Other analysts believe that unlike a bad bank set up by the private sector, a bad bank backed by the government is likely to pay too much for stressed assets.

Need for 'bad bank' to ease the bad loan crisis:

- A key reason behind the bad loan crisis in public sector banks is the nature of their ownership.
- Unlike private banks, public sector banks are managed by bureaucrats who may often not have the same commitment to ensuring these lenders' profitability.
- To that extent, bailing out banks through a bad bank does not really address the root problem of the bad loan crisis.
- Further, there is a huge risk of moral hazard. Commercial banks that are bailed out by a bad bank are likely to have little reason to mend their ways.

Bad bank and its impact on credit flow in the economy:

- Some experts believe that by taking bad loans off the books of troubled banks, a bad bank can help free capital of over ₹5 lakh crore that is locked in by banks as provisions against these bad loans.
- This will give banks the freedom to use the freed-up capital to extend more loans to their customers.
- This gives the impression that banks have unused funds lying in their balance sheets that they could use if only they could get rid of their bad loans.
- It is important not to mistake banks' reserve requirements for their capital position. This is because what may be stopping banks from lending more aggressively may not be the lack of sufficient reserves which banks need to maintain against their loans.

Global Experience:

- The idea of a bad bank has been tried out in countries such as the U.S., Germany, Japan and others in the past.
- The troubled asset relief program, also known as TARP, implemented by the U S. Treasury in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, was modelled around the idea of a bad bank.

Nut Graf

The problem of bad loans has been a perennial one in the Indian banking sector; the decision to set up a bad bank can improve banks' capital buffers by freeing up capital, it could help banks feel more confident to start lending again.

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth and development

9. Open network for digital commerce

» Prelims: Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

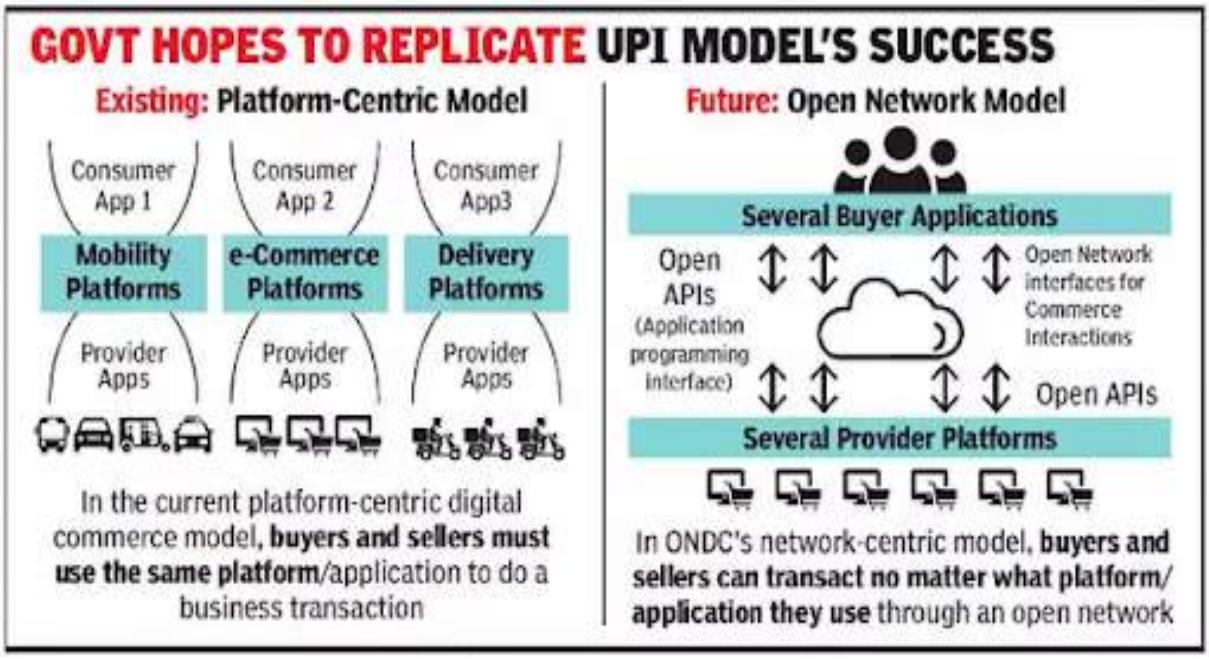
» Mains: Details about ONDC and the need for the formation of ONDC

Context:

- The Union Government has announced the launch of the pilot phase of the open network for digital commerce (ONDC) in five cities.

Open Network for Digital Commerce:

- ONDC is a not-for-profit organisation that provides a platform that helps local digital commerce stores across industries in the country to be discovered and engaged by any network-enabled applications.
- ONDC is neither an aggregator application nor a hosting platform, and all the existing digital commerce applications and platforms can voluntarily choose to adopt and be a part of the ONDC network.
- The ONDC aims to provide a single platform that enables customers to buy products from all the participating e-commerce platforms.
- The open network concept also extends beyond the retail sector, to any digital commerce domains such as wholesale, mobility, food delivery, logistics, travel, urban services, etc.
- The government is looking to take up the ONDC model and try to replicate the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
  * The UPI allows individuals to send or receive money irrespective of the payment platforms they are registered on.
- ONDC was proposed as an entity that would work without the need for day-to-day interventions and advisories from the shareholders.
  * The independence of the management is linked to the financial independence of the entity, and therefore, the entity will have to get independent funding and have a self-sustaining financial model.



Reasons for the formation of ONDC:

- According to an outreach programme conducted by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was seen that there was a huge gap in the scale of online demand and the ability of the local retail ecosystem to participate.
    - Extensive consultations with various ministries and industry experts were conducted and the ONDC envisaged to revolutionise digital commerce in India.
- Further, ONDC was introduced with an aim to democratise India's fast-growing digital e-commerce sector which is presently dominated by the two U.S.-based firms namely Amazon and Walm

Current status of ONDC:

- Currently, ONDC is in its incipient stage in five cities namely Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Shillong and Coimbatore, with a target of registering about 150 retailers.
- The government has set up an advisory council to identify the potential of ONDC as a concept and advise the government on the steps required to accelerate its adoption.
    - The advisory council includes industry experts as well as members from various government organisations.
- The ONDC in the next five years plans to bring on board 90 crore users and 12 lakh sellers on the network which would enable 730 crore additional purchases and an additional gross merchandising value (GMV) of ₹3.75 crores.
    - The GMV for the digital commerce retail market in India was ₹2.85 lakh crore in 2020, which constitutes a meagre 4.3% of the total retail GMV in India.

Nut Graf

The ONDC platform is expected to revolutionise the e-commerce sector and make it more inclusive and accessible for consumers by simplifying the process of cataloguing, inventory management, management of orders and the fulfilment of orders.

Agriculture

10. Climate change and crop failure

» Mains: The consequences of climate change and irregularities in weather phenomena on agriculture.

Context:

- Climate change-induced deficient rainfall in Kerala.

Details:

- Except for mild drizzles, the third week of June, which was supposed to experience the onset of monsoons, has been rather dry.
- The large rain deficiency during the month of June along with the soaring temperature levels poses the threat of crop failure.
- Further, a delayed or failed monsoon will impact a variety of crops and impact the capsule formation and the yield.
- Prolonged dry spells, delayed monsoons, intensity shifts and cloudbursts highlight the fact that there is a significant change in the rainfall pattern.

Seasonal rainfall | June 1 to 22, 2022

SUBDIVISION/ DISTRICTS	ACTUAL RAINFALL (MM)	NORMAL RAINFALL (MM)	PERCENTAGE DEPARTURE (%)	
Kerala	192.9	463.9	-58	Deficient
Lakshadweep	281	261.4	7	Normal
Alappuzha	198.5	415.8	-52	Deficient
Kannur	202.4	622.4	-67	Large deficient
Ernakulam	264.7	510.7	-48	Deficient
Idukki	156.8	510.3	-69	Large deficient
Kasaragod	257.1	699.3	-63	Large deficient
Kollam	125.7	323.6	-61	Large deficient
Kottayam	266.6	472	-44	Deficient
Kozhikode	286.2	637.6	-55	Deficient
Malappuram	197.6	446.1	-56	Deficient
Palakkad	87.5	316.5	-72	Large deficient
Pathanamthitta	209.4	371.9	-44	Deficient
Thiruvananthapuram	103.5	247	-58	Deficient
Thrissur	307.1	519.2	-41	Deficient
Wayanad	117	461.2	-75	Large deficient
Mahe	259.8	587.8	-56	Deficient

Percentage departure from normal value
Large excess: +60% and above | Excess: +20% to +59%
Normal: +19% to -19% | Deficient: -20% to -59%
Large deficient: -60% to -99% | No rain: -100%

Image Source: The Hindu

Consequences of climate change and irregularities in weather phenomena:

On the cultivation of Cardamom:

- Cardamom is one of the thermosensitive crops which has been impacted by increasing temperature, changes in weather patterns and extreme weather conditions.
- Cardamom cultivators say that the inconsistent rains are causing yield loss and delay in flowering, and the fluctuations in temperature and humidity are causing pest attacks.
- Farmers highlight the fact that the average yield per acre has come down to 160-170 kg of dried cardamom from 250 kg in the past.

On the cultivation of Cashew nut:

- The Aralam Farming Corporation Kerala Limited in Kannur, which accounts for about 90% of the raw cashew nut production in Kerala, witnessed a record fall in yield.
- The total yield has come down to 90 tonnes compared to 184 tonnes in the previous season (2021).
- The excess rainfall during the flowering season which continues till November (2021) impacted the fruit setting process as the nuts started sprouting which resulted in the loss of nearly 1,500 kg of nuts.
- Further, the increase in the temperature has affected the quality of the produce.

On Paddy cultivation:

- Heavy rainfall at the beginning of the harvest season has severely impacted paddy cultivation.
- Further, heavy summer rainfall increased the frequency of bacterial leaf blight disease in paddy and caused severe losses to the farmers.

On Pest attacks:

- The variations in temperature and relative humidity lead to the emergence of new pests and diseases, leaving many crops susceptible to attacks and outbreaks.
- Due to the increase in the frequency of pest attacks, farmers are forced to use local chemical pesticides which will have severe consequences on the fertility of the soil in the long term.

Other consequences:

- In January 2021, a sub-zero temperature was recorded in Munnar and the cold wave severely affected the vegetable tracts in Vattavada.
- In Idukki, the temperature is increasing during the day and the night temperature is falling. This increasing gap in the daily range of temperature significantly impacts a high range of crops growing in forest-agro ecosystems.
- In Marayur, sugarcane cultivators lost an entire season, when Kerala experienced a very high rainfall of 105.5 mm as compared to the normal of 11.0 mm.
- Heavy rainfall will lower the soil fertility and turn it acidic and further as the topsoil is washed away there will be a depletion in organic matter.
- Also, the climate change and the resulting shift in the cropping pattern have impacted thermosensitive crops such as cocoa, black pepper, coffee and tea.

Nut Graf

The irregularities in the climate due to climate change have induced a shift in the cropping pattern and have far-reaching implications on the cultivation of various crops which pose a significant threat to the livelihoods, economy and food security of the country. This makes it crucial for the policymakers to develop adaptation and mitigation strategies at the earliest.

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

11. Salt sector crisis pinches livelihood of lakhs

» Prelims: Salt industry in India

» Mains: Challenges associated with the salt industry in India

Salt industry in India:

- India is ranked as the third-largest producer of Salt in the World after China and USA.
- At the time of Indian independence, India was importing salt from the UK and the salt industry in India has achieved tremendous growth in terms of becoming self-sufficient and also exporting its surplus.
- The major sources of salt in the country include:
  * Sea brine
  * Lake brine
  * Sub-soil brine
  * Rock salt deposits
- Nearly 99.5% of salt is produced either from the seawater or from the subsoil water and the entire process is done by seeding, cultivation and harvest.
- The major salt-producing states are Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal.
  * Gujarat produces nearly 28.5 million tonnes of salt a year, which is about 80% of India's total production.
- About five lakh people currently work in the salt industry
- It is estimated that 87.6% of the total number of salt producers are small-scale producers.
- Salt is listed under the Union List of the seventh schedule of the Constitution of India.

Challenges associated with the salt industry in India:

- The salt industry is currently facing huge challenges in meeting the demand and in addressing the crisis faced by salt farmers.
  * At present, India produces 36 million tonnes of salt and its demand, including for export, is 31.5 million tonnes. However, the demand is increasing at the rate of 8% but the production is increasing at just 3%.
  * This is expected to create a demand and supply gap in the coming years.
- Currently, farmers earn about ₹250 to ₹300 for a tonne of salt produced and the problem is that the prices keep fluctuating.
  * Farmers are facing low prices as there is no minimum support price (MSP).
- Further, the workers are affected because of the lack of an adequate system for wages and social security benefits.
- Even after 75 years of Independence, the laws governing the salt industry are the ones that were framed by the British.
  * About 120 years ago, Britishers extracted salt from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh through mining and hence the British put salt production as mining.
  * But currently, only about 0.5% of salt is produced through mining.
  * Experts say that since it is listed as a mining industry, all laws governing the industries are applicable to salt production even as the production is done through simple solar evaporation.

Nut Graf

The challenges and concerns associated with the salt industry have to be immediately addressed as the industry has played a crucial role in changing the course of the history of India and continues to be the source of livelihood to lakhs of people in the country.

Infrastructure: Roads

12. Speeding major cause of death: Lancet study

» Mains: The need for the government interventions regarding road safety

Context:

- New Lancet study on fatal road injuries.

Details:

- This Lancet study points out that interventions focusing on four key risk factors namely speeding, drunk driving, non-use of crash helmets and seat belts could help avoid about 25% to 40% of the 13.5 lakh fatal road injuries worldwide every year.
- This is the first study that provides country-specific estimates of the impact of addressing four key road safety risk factors through interventions for 185 countries.
- It says that in India, interventions to check speeding could help save 20,554 lives. promotion of crash helmets could save about 5,683 lives and encouraging the use of seat belts can save 3,204 lives.

Safety check | The table lists the country-wise number of lives that can be saved through interventions in key road safety risk factors. For instance, 20,554 lives can be saved in India every year if steps are taken to check vehicle speed

	Drunk-driving	Helmet use	Speeding	Seat belt use
India	NA	5,683	20,554	3,204
U.S.	5,188	14,121	22,353	2,409
China	248	13,703	88,374	13,228
Mexico	1,072	911	7,532	2,395
S.A.	2,684	176	6,233	3,718
Thailand	652	3,057	6,557	1,872
Turkey	72	202	3,064	1,691

Image source: The Hindu

Data on accident-related deaths in India:

- About 14 lakh people die each year and up to 5 crore are injured due to road traffic injuries globally.
  - India accounts for close to 10% of all crash-related deaths while accounting for only 1% of the world's vehicles.
- According to a report by Road Transport and Highway Ministry in 2020, a total of 1,31,714 deaths were recorded due to road accidents.
  - Over speeding constituted about 69.3% of deaths
  - Non-wearing of helmets accounted for 30.1% of deaths
  - Non-use of seat belts resulted in 11.5% of deaths
- According to the data from Global Burden Diseases, 2017, over 2 lakh deaths were estimated in India due to road injuries in 2017.

The Decade of Action for Global Road Safety

- In 2010, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the period 2011–2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety.
- Aim: to stabilize and then reduce the forecast level of road traffic fatalities around the world by increasing activities conducted at the national, regional and global levels.
- The second decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 sets an ambitious target of preventing at least 50% of road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030.
- The Lancet report says that the current challenges in the field of road safety and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are the key challenges to achieving the ambitious goal of the second Decade of Action for Global Road Safety.

Nut Graf

Road traffic injuries are said to be the eighth leading cause of death worldwide for all ages and the first cause in the age group of 5-29 years. This requires the policymakers and the global road safety community to immediately intervene and undertake steps to address key road safety risk factors.

Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

13. 'India's gig workforce to reach 2.35 cr. by 2030'

» Mains: Significance and concerns associated with platformalization of work; Important recommendations of the NITI Aayog in this direction

Context:

- NITI Aayog Launches Report on India's Gig and Platform Economy.
  - The report presents comprehensive perspectives and recommendations on the gig–platform economy in India. It highlights the opportunities and challenges of this emerging sector and presents global best practices on initiatives for social security and delineates strategies for skill development and job creation for different categories of workers in the sector.

Details:

- According to the study, the number of gig workers in India is estimated to be 77 lakh in 2020-21 and is expected to grow to 2.35 crore by 2029-30.

- One of the major concerns with this platformisation of work is that platform labour falls outside of the purview of the traditional classification of formal and informal labour and hence misses out on many aspects of workplace protection and entitlements.
- In this direction, NITI Aayog has recommended a balanced framework that balances the flexibility offered by platforms while also ensuring the social security of workers. The NITI Aayog has recommended providing paid leave, occupational disease and accident insurance, support during irregularity of work and pension plans.
- NITI Aayog has also recommended introducing a 'Platform India initiative' on the lines of the 'Startup India initiative'.

Other notable recommendations:

- Accelerating access to finance through products specifically designed for platform workers.
- Linking self-employed individuals engaged in the business of selling regional and rural cuisine, street food, etc., with platforms to enable them to sell their produce to wider markets in towns and cities.
- Engaging in platform-led transformational and outcome-based skilling.
- Enhancing social inclusion through gender sensitization and accessibility awareness programmes for workers and their families and extending social security measures in partnership mode as envisaged in the Code on Social Security 2020.
- Undertaking a separate enumeration exercise to estimate the size of the gig and platform workforce and collecting information during official enumerations (Periodic Labour Force Survey) to identify gig workers.

Government Budgeting

14. Revenue Deficit Grants

» Prelims: Revenue deficit grants- recommending body; Supporting article of Indian Constitution.

Context:

- The Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance has recently released the 3rd monthly instalment of Post Devolution Revenue Deficit (PDRD) Grant to 14 States.

Details:

- The grants are released to the States to meet the gap in Revenue Accounts of the States post-devolution.
- The Revenue Deficit grants are released based on the recommendations of the Finance Commission which analyses the gap between the assessment of revenue and expenditure of the State after considering the assessed devolution.
- The Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grants are provided to the States under Article 275 of the Constitution.
- The Fifteenth Finance Commission has recommended Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grant to 14 States for the financial year 2022-23. The states include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

Agriculture

15. Purple Revolution

» Prelims: Purple Revolution; Aroma Mission

Context:

- Union Minister's statement on the "Purple Revolution".

Background:

- Purple revolution is the term used to describe the success seen in aroma/lavender cultivation.
- It has become a popular agricultural start-up option.
- It has boosted rural farmer employment, ignited entrepreneurship in the production of aromatic oils and other aromatic products, and decreased imports of essential and aromatic oils.
- The initiative is spearheaded by the Aroma Mission of the CSIR.
- CSIR is also planning to introduce the aroma crops in other hilly States with similar climatic conditions like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and in the North-Eastern States after the success in J&K.

Why lavender?

- CSIR introduced the high-value essential oil-bearing lavender crop through its Jammu-based laboratory, the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicines (IIIM) for cultivation in J&K.
- Lavender is a crop native to Europe and it has now been naturalized for India in its regions with a temperate climate.
- Lavender is a tough plant that can tolerate drought and frost conditions.
- It requires good sunlight also.
- At higher altitudes, it gives higher yields.

Agriculture

16. National Conference on Millets

» Prelims: Millet production in India

» Mains: Significance of Millets

Details:

- The National Conference on Millets was conducted by ASSOCHAM along with the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

Details:

- Opportunities and challenges in ensuring food and nutritional security in India were discussed in the conference.

- The theme of the conference was "The Future Super Food for India".

Important Facts:

- The production of coarse cereals in the country has increased to 17.96 million tonnes in 2020-21 from 14.52 million tonnes in 2015-16 and the production of bajra (pearl millet) has also increased to 10.86 million tonnes in the same period.
- India is now the 5th largest exporter of millets globally.

Significance of millets:

- Millets have a long history in India and they can be grown well in dry areas or even on lands with deficient and low fertility.
- Due to their short growing season, millets can develop from seeds to ready-to-harvest crops in just about 65 days and this characteristic of the millets is of vital importance in thickly populated regions of the world.
- It is also highly nutritious and offers multiple health benefits.
- They can last for two years or more if stored properly.
- The major millets producing states in India include Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

Agriculture

17. Mithun

» Prelims: Mithun

Context:

- The Union Agriculture Minister visited the National Mithun Research Center.

National Mithun Research Center:

- The National Research Centre on Mithun was set up in 1988 in Nagaland.
- National Mithun Research Center is an autonomous research centre that works under the aegis of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.
- Aim: To provide impetus to the research work on Mithun
- ICAR-National Mithun Research Center has been playing key roles in the conservation, breeding and health management of this magnificent species.

Mithun (Gayal):

- Mithun is a ruminant species belonging to the family Bovidae and is considered to be a domesticated form of wild gaur which is indigenous to the eastern Himalayas.
- It is also referred to as the 'sacrificial ox' of the North-Eastern Region of India as it plays a key role in the traditions and rituals of the tribal population of the region.
- Mithun is found mainly in north-eastern hill region of India and also in China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh.
- Mithun is the state animal of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Important initiatives/schemes/programmes

18. Udyami Bharat Programme

» Prelims: Udyami Bharat programme

» Mains: Government initiatives for the MSME sector

Context:

- PM participates in the 'Udyami Bharat' programme.

Details:

- During the programme, the Prime Minister launched several initiatives for the MSME sector. They are:
  * Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme
  * Capacity Building of First-Time MSME Exporters (CBFTE) scheme
  * New features of the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme:

- The scheme aims to scale up the implementation capacity and coverage of MSMEs in the states, with impact enhancement of existing MSME schemes.
- It has an initial outlay of Rs.6000 crores.
- It will complement the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan by fostering innovation, encouraging ideation, incubating new business and entrepreneurship by developing quality standards, improving practices and processes, enhancing market access, deploying technological tools and Industry 4.0 to make MSMEs competitive and self-reliant.

Capacity Building of First-Time MSME Exporters (CBFTE) scheme

- The scheme aims to encourage MSMEs to offer products and services of international standards for the global market.
- This is expected to enhance the participation of Indian MSMEs in the global value chain and help them realise their export potential.

New Features of the PMEGP Scheme:

- An increase in the maximum project cost to Rs 50 lakhs (from Rs 25 lakhs) for the manufacturing sector.
- An increase in the maximum project cost to 20 lakhs (from Rs 10 lakhs) in the service sector.
- Inclusion of applicants from Aspirational districts & Transgenders in the Special Category applicants for availing higher subsidies.
- Handholding support for applicants/entrepreneurs through the engagement of banking, technical & marketing experts.

Government Initiatives

19. NIRYAT Portal

» Prelims: NIRYAT Portal

Context:

- PM inaugurates 'Vanijya Bhawan' and launches NIRYAT portal.

Details:

- It is an information portal where importers and exporters can get all necessary information related to foreign trade and will provide real-time data to stakeholders.
- NIRYAT stands for National Import-Export for Yearly Analysis of Trade.
- The portal dedicatedly deals with the import and export analysis of India.
- NIRYAT has been pegged as a one-stop platform for stakeholders for easy access to critical information related to India's foreign trade by the Centre.

Economic Terminology

20. Dutch disease

» Prelims: Dutch disease

- Dutch Disease in economics refers to a phenomenon wherein a country witnesses uneven growth across sectors due to the discovery of natural resources, especially large oil reserves. It considers an apparent causal relationship between the increase in the economic development of a specific sector and a decline in other sectors.
- According to the concept, when a country discovers natural resources and starts exporting them to the rest of the world, it causes the exchange rate of the currency to appreciate significantly. This decreases the price competitiveness of exports from other sectors while encouraging imports. In the long run, these factors can contribute to unemployment, as manufacturing jobs move to lower-cost countries.
- The term 'Dutch disease' was first coined in 1977 to describe the decline of the manufacturing industry in the Netherlands after the discovery of gas reserves in the North Sea.

Economic Terminology

21. Stagflation

» Prelims: Stagflation, Inflation

» Mains: Possible outcomes of the Ukraine-Russia war in the context of the Indian economy.

Context:

- The aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has imposed more inflationary shocks on different parts of the world, disrupting the progress of the global economy.

Stagflation:

- It refers to the economic conditions which are determined by a stagnant economic output and high price inflation.
- The idea of stagflation gathered momentum during the intense economic crisis in the US which included recession, and high price inflation due to oil shocks.
- It has been practically observed that high economic growth invariably spurs faster inflation. This is why the central banks issue a specific mandate to control price rise beyond a targeted level.
- The proper maintenance of economic output (expressed in terms of GDP), employment level, and inflation rate are essential for the performance of an economy in its entirety.
- Stagflation is witnessed when the overall pace of the economy slows down to a large extent.
- This results in high unemployment, reduced economic activities, shutting down of businesses and so on.
- Highlighting the current situation in India, the major concern of stagflation is raised due to the slowdown of economic activity during the pandemic and the implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict which has nurtured a global supply shock.

Indian Economy and issues relating to growth, development and employment.

22. 10 lakh employment

» Prelims: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

» Mains: Issues regarding unemployment in India and Recommendations

Context:

- The Central government's move to recruit personnel on a "mission mode".

Details

- Latest reports suggest that there were about 8.86 lakh vacant jobs among all central government civilian posts as of March 2020.
- The Prime Minister of India announced that the Government will be recruiting 10 lakh personnel within the next 18 months.
- These personnel are expected to fill the current vacancies in the Railways, the armed forces and GST departments among others.

Unemployment in India

- The leaked Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in 2018 showed that India's unemployment rate was the highest (6.07%) in four decades.
- According to the latest PLFS data the overall unemployment rate was reported to be 4.2% in 2020-21 compared to 4.8% in 2019-20 and the labour force participation rate (LFPR) increased to 41.6% in 2020-21 from 40.1% in 2019-20.
    * The decrease in the unemployment rate is not to be cheered as the decrease has also coincided with the transfer of employment into lower productive and unpaid jobs away from salaried employment.
    * Also, the industrial jobs have reduced with more employment in agricultural and farm-related jobs. This trend has increased post the pandemic and the lockdowns and has not reversed since then.
- According to the PLFS 2020-21 report, a significant number of workers are neither eligible for paid leave and social benefits nor had a written contract pointing out the poor quality of jobs in the Indian economy.
- As per the National Crime Records Bureau, one Indian committed suicide every hour in 2019 as a result of joblessness, poverty, or insolvency.
- Several jobless individuals in India protested in January 2022 about reported problems in the railway employment procedure.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

- Considering the importance of availability of labour force data at more frequent time intervals, the National Statistical Office (NSO) launched the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in April 2017
- It is India's first computer-based survey and was convened based on the recommendation by a committee headed by Amitabh Kundu.
- Periodic Labour Force Survey, gives estimates of key employment and unemployment indicators like the labour force participation rate, worker population ratio, proportion unemployed and unemployment rate in rural households annually and on a quarterly basis for the urban households.

Labour force participation rate

- The Labour Force Participation Rate is the percentage of the population which is either working (employed) or seeking work (unemployed).
- The authentic data regarding LFPR is released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation through the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

Concerns regarding the government jobs:

- Vacancies in the government are not being filled at a sufficient pace.
    * As per official data, there were over 60 lakh vacancies in the government across all levels in July 2021.
    * The government has sought to push for recruitment in a mission-mode for over 1.5 years. However, this would fall short of the size of the problem.
- Also, where vacancies are being filled, they are notably skewed towards contractual jobs.
    * In 2014, about 43% of government employees had non-permanent or contractual jobs, as per the Indian Staffing Industry Research 2014 report. By 2018, the share of government employees in this category had risen to 59%.
    * ○ Some States have sought to give a push for increasing contractual employment, where such employees are not offered allowances and typical benefits.

Recommendations:

- **Expanding public service:**
    * Instead of increasing contractual employment, the government should focus on improving public services.
    * Expanding public service provisioning will also result in the establishment of high-quality employment and skilled workers, providing us with social stability.
- **Job opportunities**
    * Focus should be on industries with high job-creation potential such as the generation of renewable energy – rooftop solar power generating, solar panel module manufacturing, and end-of-life servicing.

* Additionally, the government must continue to promote urban farming, which has major job opportunities in permaculture, gardening, and nursery.

Nut graf:

For a nation with a significant demographic dividend, unemployment has remained a major concern in recent years. The government's decision to recruit personnel is expected to address the issue to an extent and the government is expected to work on a war footing in the coming days to tackle issues of unemployment issues and quality of employment.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. India's taliban rapprochement

» Mains: India's re-orientation of ties with the Taliban and arguments for and against this move

Background:

- India has recently sent a senior diplomatic delegation to the Taliban-occupied Kabul.
- This is being viewed by the international observers with surprise given the stand that India had taken after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. India had cut out all diplomatic ties and in fact India was the first country to immediately ban all Afghans travelling to India after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.
- Hence the move to send a senior diplomatic delegation is being seen as India's apparent reorientation with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.
- This development can be seen as a culmination of India's quiet diplomacy and signalling in the last few months. Notably, India has abstained from directly criticizing the Taliban regime and has also abstained from crucial UN votes against the Taliban regime and has continued to remain silent about a worsening situation in Afghanistan.

Possible factors behind India's reorientation with the Taliban regime:

- India's apparent reorientation can be described and understood as an example of
- Realpolitik is a system of politics or principles based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.
- India is putting its national interest before its international obligations and values. Having a diplomatic foothold in the Taliban occupied Afghanistan will allow India to secure its interests not only in Afghanistan but also in the larger Central Asian region as well. Also it will allow India to curtail Pakistan's leverage with the Taliban regime and it's strategic depth in Pakistan to some extent.
- India's ties with the Taliban may allow India to attain its key strategic interests in Afghanistan in the domain of security and trade and commerce as well.

Arguments against India's rapprochement with Taliban:

Overlooking of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan:

- The Taliban have excluded all non-Taliban Pashtuns from public space and there are also systematic violations of the human rights of the non-Pashtun communities which amount to crime against humanity, and ethnic cleansing which borders on genocide.
- India's rapprochement with the Taliban regime comes across as India neglecting the plight of these sections of the Afghan society and this would undermine the hard earned goodwill that India has historically enjoyed among the Afghan population for its developmental and assistance work in the region.
- India is seen as an ideational and trustworthy partner nation by the Afghan population. India's recent move could prove to be counter-productive as this could lead to the loss of trust and goodwill of Afghans toward India.

Affect India's global standing:

- This move also comes across as India being a bandwagoning, transactional and opportunistic nation and does not augur well for India's aspiration to become a global power. This will thus affect India's global standing to a great extent.

Doubts over the benefits of this move:

- Though India's move is being viewed as an attempt to create an India-friendly faction within the Taliban, given the way Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment has dealt with dissidents in Taliban, the move to reorient ties with the Taliban comes across as just wishful thinking on the part of India.
- Hence there are serious doubts over whether a potential India-Taliban rapprochement advance India's interests in Afghanistan.

Antithetical to "India First" policy:

- Afghanistan remains a major security-centric concern for India, in particular, the nexus of extremism and terrorism, illicit drugs and proxy warfare. India happens to be the primary target for the extremist and terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan.

> ***Nut Graf***
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> *The move to send a senior diplomatic delegation to the Taliban-occupied Kabul by the Union government is indicative of India's intentions to re-orient its ties with the Taliban regime in a bid to sustain India's interests in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region. However there are serious doubts over the efficacy of this move.*

Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

2. India- Vietnam defence ties

» Mains: India's defence partnership with Vietnam and its significance

Context:

- The Indian Defence Minister's visit to Vietnam saw the signing of a number of important agreements between the two countries.
- The Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030 was signed during the visit.
- The Joint Vision Statement is aimed at boosting the scope and scale of the existing defence cooperation between the two nations pertaining to both regional and global issues.
- The two countries also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Mutual Logistics Support.
- This is the first such agreement signed by Vietnam with any other country.

Background:

- Vietnam shares a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India.
- Defence partnership between India and Vietnam has been growing steadily over the years.
- The Defence Protocol was signed in 2000 and currently India-Vietnam defence relationship includes extensive navy-to-navy cooperation spanning the exchange of intelligence, production and logistical support for Vietnam's defence requirements, development of naval facilities such as Nha Trang as well as the supply of warships and cruise missiles to Vietnam by India.

Significance of the India-Vietnam defence relationship:

Maritime domain:

- For India and Vietnam, the maritime domain in particular has occupied a central focus due to the following reasons.
- A substantial volume of maritime trade passes through sea lanes of communication in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The region also holds promise of large energy reserves.

China factor:

- The enhanced geostrategic prominence of China and its increasingly assertive behaviour in the region has resulted in an increase in emphasis on cooperative mechanisms and frameworks across the region.
- India and Vietnam have been developing strong bonds in this context. Vietnam has been critical of China's periodic transgressions in the South China Sea. India has supported Vietnam's position in the South China Sea. India has also not backed down from continuing ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL)'s oil exploration project in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone despite China's protests.

Convergence of views:

- Both Vietnam and India find convergence in their approaches in the Indo-Pacific region.
- India's Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific policy and maritime multilateralism and security outreach across the Indo-Pacific make Vietnam a natural partner for India.
- Both countries support the freedom of navigation and uphold sovereign maritime territorial rights as enshrined under international maritime law.

Recommendation:

- The early finalisation of the $500 million Defence Line of Credit extended by India to Vietnam and the implementation of existing defence and security projects/agreements between the two nations should be a top priority for both sides. This will help India cement its place as a net security provider in the region and also complement its 'Make in India, Make for the world' vision on the one hand while on the other hand it will help strengthen Vietnam's defence capabilities.

Nut Graf

The deepening of India-Vietnam ties is significant for both the countries as it will help Vietnam strengthen its defence capabilities and also help India position itself as a net security provider in the region and also strengthen its presence in the vital Indo-Pacific region amidst the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese.

Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

3. India-UAE relations

» Mains: Significance of the India-UAE bilateral relationship and recommendations to strengthen this relationship.

Context:

- Indian Prime Minister took part in two summits in the recent past – the 48th G7 summit in Germany and a bilateral summit in Abu Dhabi with the UAE President. Though the G7 summit was highlighted in the media, the bilateral summit with UAE is also equally important given the significance of the India-UAE relationship.

Significance of India-UAE bilateral relationship:

- UAE is a large trading partner of India. The bilateral trade between the two countries has grown by 68% in 2021-22 to $72.9 billion, a new record. India is the UAE's second-largest trading partner, and largest source of tourists and manpower. Notably, the UAE market is an important export market for Indian goods and services.
- UAE is a substantial investor in India. In fact, UAE is a bigger investor in India in 2021 than Germany and France combined. Notably, UAE has signed a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India.
- A large Indian diaspora stays in UAE and they account for the largest share of inward foreign remittances for India.

Way forward for the India and UAE relationship:

- The Abu Dhabi summit should be used to recalibrate the bilateral ties between India and UAE. In this regard, the article makes the following recommendations.
  - * Opportunities for mutual benefits should be prioritized.
  - * India offers a lucrative market for investments from UAE. UAE would find it financially rewarding to invest in one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India. This would be a win-win opportunity for both countries.
- Given the large employment opportunities available for Indian emigrants in UAE, India should consider adequately skilling and training such emigrants to enlarge the job opportunities for Indians.
- At the international level, India and UAE must collaborate and co-operate for reconstruction efforts in war-ravaged regional countries such as Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan. This would help increase the regional standing of the two countries and also ensure peace and security in the region.
- At the bilateral level, the two countries should seek more collaboration in the domain of internal security and anti-terrorism.

> ***Nut Graf***
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> *The India-UAE relationship holds immense potential for both the countries and all efforts must be made to strengthen this relationship further.*

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

4. India-Iran relations

» Prelim: IAEA, Structure of OIC.

» Mains: The friction in settled relations between India and the traditional ally Iran.

Context:

- The recent first-ever visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister.

Background:

- Recently, the Iranian Foreign Minister engaged with India on bilateral relations from energy security and infrastructure investments. This is particularly relevant considering the divergence in the relationship between India and Iran, who are moving towards USA and China respectively.

Crucial Significance of the Bilateral Visit for India:

- The visit is the first by a member of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, which has been taking strong positions against issues such as the treatment of minorities, the Kashmir dispute and more recently row over comments on Prophet Muhammad.
- This visit is succeeded by the visit of Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz; this envelops the Indian Foreign Policy of De-Hyphenation of relations in West Asia.
- The West-imposed sanction over the Iranian Nuclear Project in the fallout of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is also under process with the Board of Governors of IAEA meeting in Vienna.
- Since the fall of Afghanistan to Taliban forces, Iran and India came to an agreement about engaging with Afghanistan in order to ensure cross border terrorism does not contaminate the area.
- Iranian oil can allow the West and India to lower the demands for Russian oil, this was underlined by the Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar.
- The visit is the first since the time India joined the alliance of UAE-Israel-USA which is traditionally regarded as 'anti-Iran' considering Iranian support to Yemeni Houthi rebels which attacked a UAE oil facility recently.

Suggested Measures for India:

- India must cultivate Iran to be a voice in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation since Pakistan has been a vocal anti-India voice in the organization. Recent comments on the Kashmir dispute have elicited strong reactions from India, this should be coupled with active support by members within the OIC such as UAE and Iran.
- India has maintained a steady de-hyphenation of foreign policy with greater engagement with Israel and Iran simultaneously, though the engagements with Iran have reduced in the recent past; it is still regarded as a traditional ally. There is a need for India to maintain isolation from West Asian politics and ensure that its national interest is not intermixed with international affairs.
- Due to the fallout of JCPOA since President Trump's unilateral move to revoke the agreement, India suffered crucial losses due to its investments in Iran such as Chabahar Port. Though exemption to Chabahar was given, there was no exemption from sanctions given for Iranian oil. This has led to spiralling domestic inflation in terms of crude oil. If the agreement between Iran and IAEA is reached, it shall allow India to operate its assets in Iranian territory.
- India must cultivate a partnership with Iran with a special focus on Afghanistan. In the recent past, there have been higher instances of cross-border terrorism, gun-running, and drug smuggling on the western border of India. This is also because of the destabilised situation in Afghanistan. Iran enjoys a vast territorial border with Afghanistan which would help India in leveraging its position in this matter.
- The economic ties are dwindling at around 2 billion dollars (2020-21) from 17 billion dollars (2017-18). This has further distanced Iran and pushed it towards China. However, in the backdrop of the Chinese debt-induced crisis in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, India

must engage with Iran more and hitch Iran into its partnership as that would allow for multilateral growth in the region and also allow the safety of India's ever-increasing energy needs.

Way Forward:

- There is a need for better engagement and relationship between India and Iran. Due to the multifarious needs of both parties, there should be cooperation, coordination and consensus between the interests of both nations.

> ***Nut Graf***
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> *The new paradigms of international relations are unpredictable and the terrain keeps shifting, however, traditional alliances are the bedrock on which national foreign policy survives the vicissitudes of uncertainty.*

Bilateral, regional and global groupings or agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

5. India- West Asia relations

» Mains: India's relation with West Asian Countries and its significance

Context:

- A diplomatic fallout between India and West Asian countries due to provocative and communally charged comments made by former spokespersons of a party in India.

Details:

- Various West Asian nations such as Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE along with the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)and the six-memberGulf Cooperation Council (GCC)expressed strong reactions to the derogatory remarks made on Islam and the Prophet Muhammed.
- Indian officials have asserted that the government stood by the country's traditional values and respected all religions.
- The Indian diplomats are also entrusted to reach out to individual OIC member states and reassure them of India's position of an 'inclusive' approach to all communities.

Significance of West Asia to India:

- India's cultural, economic and trade ties with West Asian countries are deep and strong.
    * Starting from maritime trade, the exchange of goods, services and cultures between the people of the Gulf region including those on the western shores of the Arabian Sea and the people of India's southern and western States has a history of several millennia and predates even the foundation of the Islamic faith.
- The West Asian countries acted as land trade bridge to early European empires such as Greece and Rome
    * Flourishing trade in spices, cloth, silk and indigo in exchange for gold and silver is well documented.
- During the British colonial era, the rupee served as legal tender in many Gulf countries until the middle of the 20th century.
- It also said that the commercial exploitation of oil in the Gulf region during the colonial era started to alter the balance of trade flows between India and the West Asian countries
- At present, the West Asian countries collectively account for about 16% of India's total bilateral merchandise trade and contribute about 60% of India's crude oil supplies.
- Investments from sovereign wealth funds and other large investors from the GCC have increased steadily in recent years

India's dependence on West Asian countries for its energy requirements:

- Domestic crude production has been reducing recently and constitutes less than 20% of India's oil requirement.
    * This has compelled India to increase its imports to balance the gap
- As per the Observer Research Foundation's (ORF) 'India's oil imports: Trends in diversification' paper (April 2022) suggest that the share of the Gulf countries in India's total imports of crude oil has remained steady at about 60% over the last 15 years.
- The ORF study points out that in 2020-21, the top oil exporter to India was Iraq, with a share of more than 22% followed by Saudi Arabia (18%).
    * The UAE, Kuwait and Oman were other Gulf countries among the top-10 suppliers of crude oil to India in the FY 2021.
- The major share of India's refineries has historically been configured to process the sulphur-heavy sour grades of crude that are produced in the Gulf region.
- According to data compiled by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), as the sweeter (low sulphur) grades of oil such as Brent are comparatively expensive, India's crude imports have gradually shifted towards the Oman and Dubai sour grades,
- While the ratio of sour grades to sweet grades was 57:43 in the FY 2001, the gap between sour crude to Brent had widened to 75.62:24.38 in the FY March 2022.

India's non-oil trade with West Asian Countries:

- Between 2017 and 2021, Iran and the GCC member states such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman,

Kuwait and Qatar constituted about 15.3% share of India's cumulative two-way merchandise trade of $3.98 trillion

  * Out of the $609 billion of exports and imports that the seven countries accounted for in this period, the UAE contributed about 7% ($277.4 billion) making it one of India's largest trading partners.
  * Followed by Saudi Arabia with $153 billion.

- The West Asian region is a crucial market for various Indian commodities such as tea, basmati rice, electrical equipment, apparel, and machinery.
- Recently, India and the UAE signed a CEPA to increase the total value of bilateral trade in goods to more than $100 billion in five years and help trade in services breach the $15 billion mark over the same period.
  * The trade pact will help Indian exporters gain preferential market access on 99% of the country's exports to the UAE in value terms, especially to labour-intensive sectors such as gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, sports goods, plastics, furniture, agricultural and wood products, engineering products, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and automobiles
- With CEPA in place with the UAE, India is trying to seal a wider Free Trade Agreement with the GCC as a whole.
- As the region is a key hub to markets in Africa, India is interested to gain tariff-free access for its exports to the Gulf region along with its exports to countries in Africa.

Status of Indian diaspora and remittances:

- The West Asian countries are among the largest overseas jobs providers for Indians, with over 89 lakh Indians working in Gulf economies.
- The UAE (comprising seven emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah) houses over 34 lakh Indians and accounts for the largest percentage of NRIs in the region.
  * Saudi Arabia houses over 26 lakh and Kuwait about 10 lakh Indians.
- Indians are involved in a vast range of job categories in the region which include construction labor, oil industry workers, nurses and doctors, hospitality industry and finance professionals.
- The remittances sent back home by these NRIs in 2017, accounted for about 55% of the total $68.97 billion in inward remittances received in India from across the world that year.

Nut Graf

Considering the significance of West Asian countries to India and the increasing economic interconnectedness with these countries, any diplomatic fallout and disruptions would be catastrophic to India and hence the government must try and insulate its relations with these countries from any kind of fallout in the future.

India and its neighbourhood – relations.

6. In Sri Lankan crisis, a window of economic opportunity

» Mains: The potential of India – Sri Lanka relations, the challenges in their relations and the way forward.

Context:

- Against the backdrop of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister talked about the significant aspects of India-Sri Lanka relations.

Background:

- The Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe further added that "he would easily fit into Chennai or Kerala without a problem and similarly people from southern India can fit in Sri Lanka".
- Even in his previous term, Wickremesinghe had urged for the development of the south India-Sri Lanka sub-region as a single market which would help in the economic betterment of both the countries.
- In 2016 while addressing the South Asian Diaspora Convention in Singapore, he had pointed out that the five southern Indian States with a total population of 25 crores, had a combined gross state domestic product of about $450 billion and with the addition of Sri Lanka's $80 billion GDP, the sub-region would account for a $500 billion economy, with an approximate population of about 27 crores.
  * He had proposed a tri-nation economic cooperation with the inclusion of Singapore as well.
- The current crisis in Sri Lanka has pushed it closer to India for relief.

India's aid to Sri Lanka:

- India has extended help to the people of Sri Lanka in the form of aid which is close to $3.5 billion.
- India has helped Sri Lanka by supplying essentials like food, medicines, fuel and kerosene in order to ensure Sri Lanka's food, health and energy security.
- The Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of India and the Government of Sri Lanka signed an agreement for a $55-million short-term Line of Credit aimed towards the procurement of urea for the paddy crop in the ongoing 'Yala' season.
- Further, the Indian Finance Minister urged the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to extend immediate assistance to Sri Lanka.

- Tamil Nadu decided to extend an aid of about ₹123 crores which includes 40,000 tonnes of rice, various life-saving medicines and 500 tonnes of milk powder.

Huge potential of India-Sri Lanka relations:

- There is a huge opportunity for cooperation between the two countries in the sphere of infrastructure development.
- The economic crisis in Sri Lanka has revived the proposals of connecting Sri Lanka's electricity grid with that of India.
    * If the project is complete, the first point of interconnectivity on the Indian side will most likely be in Tamil Nadu.
    * India has similar cross-border energy trade with countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar.
- India also plans to develop the east coast of Sri Lanka, particularly the Trincomalee-Batticaloa line which has vast potential in the sectors of tourism, commerce, trade and industry.

Projects in pipeline:

- Recently, the Sri Lankan Cabinet was reported to have approved two connectivity proposals that include:
    * Flights from Jaffna to Trichy in Tamil Nadu,
    * Ferry service from Kankesanthurai to Karaikal in Puducherry.
- The proposed project of constructing a sea bridge and tunnel, connecting Rameshwaram and Talaimannar about which the Transport and Highways Minister of India said that the Asian Development Bank is ready to fund the project.

Hurdles in India-Sri Lanka relations:

- A few sections of the Sinhalese community in Sri Lanka still believe that India would be a threat to Sri Lanka.
    * This assumption is because of the past disturbances in the bilateral ties between the two countries which include the invasion of Sri Lanka by Indian rulers and the support provided by the Indian government to Tamil rebels during the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom.
- Although India has expressed its intentions to involve itself in the development of Sri Lanka after the civil war, the scale of its involvement has been modest.
- In recent years the previous administration in Sri Lanka had single-handedly scrapped a tripartite agreement signed in 2019 with India and Japan for the development of Colombo's East Container Terminal.
    * Later, India was accorded projects like the West Container Terminal, the Trincomalee oil tank farm and other renewable projects. However, many other proposals of India failed to begin.
- A project that envisaged a collaboration between NTPC and the Ceylon Electricity Board, was cancelled at the time when bids were to be floated for the coal-fired 500-megawatt project in Sampur in the Eastern Province.
- Other projects such as the development of the Kankesanthurai harbour and the expansion of the Palaly airport in Jaffna experienced the same fate.

Way forward:

- The uneasiness in the minds of the Sinhalese about India can be addressed by enhancing greater people-to-people interaction and contact including the pilgrimages by monks and other sections of Sri Lankan society to important Buddhist sites in India.
- Also, the movement of people and goods through the traditional sea routes of Thoothukudi-Colombo and Rameshwaram-Talaimannar must be revived.
- The opportunity provided by the current crisis in Sri Lanka should be used effectively to bring Indian and Sri Lankan societies closer which is crucial to achieving an economic union between Sri Lanka and the southern states of India.

> ***Nut Graf***
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> *The economic crisis in Sri Lanka has unlocked a huge opportunity for India to resolve the existing hurdles in the bilateral relations with Sri Lanka and through India's Neighbourhood First policy, growth can be boosted in southern India and Sri Lanka sub-region.*

Important international institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

7. Indian interests at the WTO Ministerial Conference

» Prelims: World Trade Organization (WTO) and its Ministerial Conference

» Mains: Key outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference of WTO

Context:

- 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

World Trade Organization:

- WTO was established in 1995 after the Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-94)
- WTO replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that had been established in 1948.
    * Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland
    * Members: WTO has over 160 member countries which represent about 98% of global trade.
- WTO is the only global international organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
- The key objective of the organisation is to ensure that global trade takes place as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.

- All decisions at the WTO are made through consensus among member countries at various councils and committees.
- The WTO derives its income from contributions by its members and these contributions are based on a formula that considers member's share of international trade.

Ministerial Conference of WTO:

- The Ministerial Conference (MC) is the topmost decision-making body of the WTO.
    * Ministerial conferences usually take place biennially (once every two years).
- It brings together all members of the WTO, all of which are countries or customs unions.
- The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters under any of the multilateral trade agreements.

12th Ministerial Conference:

- The WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference took place in June 2022 in Geneva.
- This Conference was co-hosted by Kazakhstan as it was originally scheduled to be held in June 2020 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan and was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- "Geneva Package" was unveiled in the latest edition of the conference which includes agreements on
    * Relaxing patent norms to achieve global vaccine equity
    * Ensuring food security
    * Extending subsidies to the fisheries sector
    * Continuation of moratoriums in e-commerce industry

Important outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference:

Discussion over Agriculture

- The agreements on agriculture are said to be very significant for India.
- The main focus of the agreements on the subject was to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of food for those in need during humanitarian emergencies.
- India, which has been a key contributor to the World Food Programme (WFP) had held that it had never imposed export restrictions for procurement under the programme and said that a blanket exemption could impact its work in ensuring domestic food security.
    * This blanket exemption would have mandated India to comply with its WFP commitments irrespective of its domestic requirements.
- It has been agreed that member countries would not impose export bans or restrictions on food items purchased for humanitarian purposes of the WFP and this agreement would not stop member countries from implementing steps to ensure domestic food security.
- Decisions were taken that encouraged member countries with available surplus to release them to the international markets in compliance with WTO regulations.
- The agreements also gave rise to a work programme that will come up with steps to help LDCs (least-developed countries) and NFIDCs (Net Food Importing Developing Countries) improve their domestic food security and increase their agricultural output.
- However, the agreements failed to address issues like the permissible public stockholding threshold for domestic food security, domestic support for agriculture, cotton, and market access.

Agreements on fisheries sector:

- India succeeded in negotiating an agreement that eliminated subsidies to those involved in illegal and unregulated fishing.
    * The only exception for the continuation of subsidies for overfishing is when they are deemed necessary to establish a biologically sustainable level.
    * Overfishing means exploiting fish at a pace faster than they could replenish themselves.
- Declining fish stocks pose a threat of aggravating poverty and thereby affecting the lives and the livelihoods of fishing communities
- The agreements also meant that there will not be any restrictions on subsidies granted by developing or least-developed countries for fishing within their exclusive economic zones (EEZ)

Agreements on the moratoriums on electronic transmissions:

- Electronic transmission (ET) constitutes online deliveries such as music, e-books, films, software and video games.
    * Despite being ordered online, ET is different from other cross-border e-commerce as they are not delivered physically.
- Agreements were reached to extend the current moratorium on not imposing customs duties on electronic transmission (ET) until MC13
    * This move was supported by over 105 countries which included advanced economies such as the U.S., the U.K., Australia, China and Japan.
        » These countries felt that in the backdrop of the COVID pandemic, an extension of the moratorium would help ensure certainty and predictability for businesses and consumers.
    * India and South Africa had opposed the move by highlighting the fact that the data from the

UN Conference on Trade and Development showed that the extension of duty-free market access due to the moratorium led to a loss of $10 billion per annum globally and about 95% of it was borne by developing countries.

» The custom duties have also been helpful in avoiding an unwanted increase in imports and also provide the required capital infusion for capacity building.

» Further, they had also asked for more clarity on what constitutes electronic transmission.

Nut Graf

The outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO have been largely beneficial to India in terms of fisheries and agriculture sectors while India was forced to compromise on its stance on IP waiver on COVID-19 essentials and custom duties on ET.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

8. BIMSTEC

» Mains: Critically evaluate the performance of BIMSTEC.

Background:

- BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand – Economic Cooperation) was formed at a meeting in Jun 1997 in Bangkok. It has completed 25 years on June 6.
- Myanmar was admitted in Dec 1997 and the organization was renamed BIMST-EC.
- The grouping expanded when Nepal and Bhutan were admitted in Feb 2004.
- The grouping's name was changed to BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) at the 1st Summit Meeting held in Bangkok in Jul 2004.

Overview:

- When BIMSTEC was created, America was dominating the international platform. In the 21st century, the United States and China dominate geopolitics, and geo-economics thereby creating new tensions and opportunities as well.
- BIMSTEC has rejuvenated itself and is viewed as the instrument of regional cooperation and integration.
- BIMSTEC should recreate the spirit of achieving its stated goals and decisions that were shaped during the Kathmandu Summit.

Achievements so far:

There are significant achievements of BIMSTEC. Some of them are mentioned below:

- Charter:
  * BIMSTEC has created a charter for itself that defines the visions, and functions of the grouping and also secure a legal personality.
- Areas of cooperation:
  * The grouping has seven sectors of priority and each country serves as the lead for the assigned sector.
- Summits:
  * Post-2014, BIMSTEC has started holding the summits and meetings of foreign ministers and succeeded in holding five summits successfully so far. At present, BIMSTEC holds regular summits once in two years.
- Progress in focus areas:
  * The grouping has made significant progress in the areas of combating terrorism, forging security cooperation, and creating mechanisms and practices for the better management of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- Institutions:
  * There are certain institutions such as Energy Center and the Center on Weather and Climate Change. They push regional cooperation forward.
- Crises:
  * The grouping has witnessed many crises such as the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh due to the result of oppression by the Myanmar military.
  * The military coup by Myanmar led to the boycott of Myanmar by several institutions.
  * Recently, the grouping also witnessed a severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

Issues with BIMSTEC:

- Inability to produce FTA:
  * One of the failures of BIMSTEC's slow progress is the inability to produce a comprehensive free trade agreement.
  * Seven agreements are needed to operationalize the FTA but only two are prepared yet.
- Connectivity issue:
  * There is a connectivity issue due to infrastructure energy, the digital and financial domain, and institutions that bring people closer together for trade, tourism, and cultural exchanges.
  * Very limited progress has been made so far despite the Master Plan for Connectivity support provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
  * All the connectivity established so far is credited to the initiatives taken by India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

- Financial resources:
  * More financial support is needed to expand regional connectivity to a greater extent.
- Some pending projects:
  * A little movement toward creating the BIMSTEC development fund.
  * No work has been done on Blue Economy yet.
  * Business chambers and corporate leaders are not fully occupied with the activities of BIMSTEC yet. Hence, the grouping is largely in the hands of experts and officials.
  * The involvement of the 'Third Space' needs to be expanded significantly.

Way Forward:

- The grouping works in the direction of achieving the visions of the Bay of Bengal Community (BOBC) which has the potential to play a vital role in deepening the linkages between Southeast Asia and South Asia.
- Synergy should be established between the newly created Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for prosperity and BIMSTEC to accelerate the growth and development of the region.
- Three members of BIMSTEC have greater responsibility. Bangladesh as the host of the BIMSTEC Secretariat; Thailand as the representative of Southeast Asia; and India as the largest state in South Asia should work towards speeding up the progress of BIMSTEC.

Nut Graf

BIMSTEC has completed 25 years of establishment. It has achieved several goals but the progress has remained a little slow due to some issues such as connectivity, financial resources, etc. It should be directed towards the growth of development by strengthening cooperation and significant measures.

Bilateral, Regional and Global groupings and agreements involving India

9. BIMSTEC TTF

» Prelims: BIMSTEC TTF

» Mains: Objectives and the expected outcome of the BIMSTEC TTF

Context

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved a Memorandum of Association (MoA) by India for the establishment of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Technology Transfer Facility (TTF)

BIMSTEC TTF:

- Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Technology Transfer Facility (TTF) was signed by the BIMSTEC member countries at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 30th March 2022.

Main objectives of the BIMSTEC TTF:

- Coordinate, facilitate and strengthen cooperation in technology transfer among the BIMSTEC Member States by promoting the transfer of technologies, sharing of experiences and capacity building.
- The TTF shall facilitate the transfer of technologies in the following priority areas Biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Information and Communication Technology, Space technology applications, Agricultural technology, Food processing technology, Pharmaceutical technology automation, New and renewable energy technology automation, New and Renewable energy technology, Oceanography, Nuclear Technology Applications, E-waste and solid waste management technology, Health Technologies, Technologies pertinent to Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation.

Governing Board of BIMSTEC TTF

- The TTF shall have a Governing Board and the overall control of activities of the TTF shall be vested in the Governing Board.
- The Governing Board shall consist of one nominee from each Member State.

Expected outcomes of the BIMSTEC TTF:

- Databank of technologies available in BIMSTEC Countries
- Repository of information on good practices in the areas of technology transfer management, standards, accreditation, metrology, testing and calibration facilities.
- Capacity building, sharing of experiences and good practices in the development
- Transfer and use of technologies among BIMSTEC countries.

Important International Institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

10. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

» Prelims: Facts about Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

» Mains: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation – its functioning, criticism and its relations with India.

Context:

- The General Secretariat of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned the comments made by two erstwhile spokespersons of an Indian political party on Prophet Muhammed.

Details:

- The OIC sought that the perpetrators be held accountable and referred to it as a part of "growing spate of hatred and defamation of Islam in India"
- The Ministry of External Affairs responded by saying that India rejected the OIC Secretariat's "unwarranted" and "narrow-minded" comments.
- Further, the ministry held that the views expressed by the two spokespersons did not reflect the views of the Indian government and the authorities had already initiated strong actions against them.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):

- The Organization was set up at the Rabat summit, Kingdom of Morocco in 1969 following the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.
- The OIC claims to be the "collective voice of the Muslim world".
- The OIC is said to be the second largest organization in the world after the United Nations.
- OIC currently has 57 countries as its members and is spread across four continents.
- Currently, OIC is headquartered in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and the organisation plans to move its headquarters to East Jerusalem
- Aim: to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.
- Objectives:
    * OIC endeavours to establish solidarity among member countries, help in restoration of complete sovereignty and territorial integrity of any member state under occupation
    * Protect, defend and combat defamation of Islam, prevent growing dissension in Muslim societies and work to ensure that member states take a united stand in various International organisations such as the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

Eligibility to join the Organisation:

- All UN members with a Muslim majority can join the organisation.
- The membership needs to be ratified with the full consensus at the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers.
- The provisions are the same for acquiring an observer status.
- The OIC is financed by the member states based on their national income.
    * If a member fails to meet such obligations prescribed, their voting rights would be suspended.

Functioning of OIC:

- The Islamic Summit which comprises the Kings and the heads of states is the apex authority of the organisation.
    * The summit takes place biennially (once in two years) and is entrusted with undertaking policy decisions and providing guidance on issues associated with the organisation.
- The Council of Foreign Ministers is the chief decision-making institution and it meets every year to decide on the implementation of OIC's general policies.
- The council appoints the Secretary General for a term of five years who is mandated to follow up on the implementation of the decisions, direct attention to OIC's specific issues of concern, create a platform for coordination among various organs and submit yearly reports on the work undertaken.
- OIC adheres to its charter that mentions its objectives, principles and operating mechanism and the member states are expected to uphold and promote good governance, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedom and the rule of law
- Further, the OIC issues a 10-year Programme of Action (PoA) and it calls for actions to combat all aspects of terrorism globally.
- The OIC has standing committees for cooperation on aspects such as cultural affairs, economic and commercial matters, scientific and technological initiatives.
- All decision-making in the forum requires a quorum defined by the presence of two-thirds of the member states and complete consensus.
    * If a consensus cannot be reached, decisions would be made by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.

Criticisms on the OIC grouping:

- Experts have criticised OIC for being more focused on the rights of Muslim minorities in regions like Palestine or Myanmar than the human rights violations of its member states.
- Critics opine that OIC lacks the power and resources to investigate human rights violations or enforce its policies through treaties and declarations.
- Critics also note that OIC is mainly focused on arbitrating conflicts where both parties are Muslims.
- Experts and analysts also point out that the organisation has failed to create a cooperative venture among its members and has also failed to become a significant organisation in international politics.

India and OIC:

- India's association with OIC has not been easy despite having cordial relations with countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia.
- India has expressed its desire to become a member of OIC but its membership and engagement have been challenged by Pakistan.

- In the recent past, the Indian External Affairs Minister has addressed the OIC Plenary of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi as a "guest of honour".
- Acknowledging India's sizeable Muslim population, Bangladesh proposed that India be given the observer status at the OIC In 2018, a move which was supported by Turkey but was opposed by Pakistan.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *India was seen improving its engagement and enhancing its influence on the OIC in recent years but the comments made by former spokespersons of a political party recently have outraged the members of OIC and this now threatens to strain India's relations with OIC.*

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries

11. China's growing footprint in the Pacific Islands

» Prelims: Pacific Island Countries

» Mains: Significance of Pacific Island Countries, China's interests in the region and the implications of China's recent moves

Context:

- The Chinese Foreign Minister is visiting ten Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and is trying to push through a comprehensive framework agreement.

Pacific Island Countries:

- The Pacific Island Countries are a group of 14 islands that are located in the tropical region of the Pacific Ocean between Asia, Australia and the two Americas.
- Pacific Island Countries include the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
- These countries are classified based on their physical and human geography into three distinct regions namely Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.
- These island nations have very small land areas and are spread across the vast Pacific ocean.
- Despite these countries being some of the smallest and least populated countries, they have some of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the world.

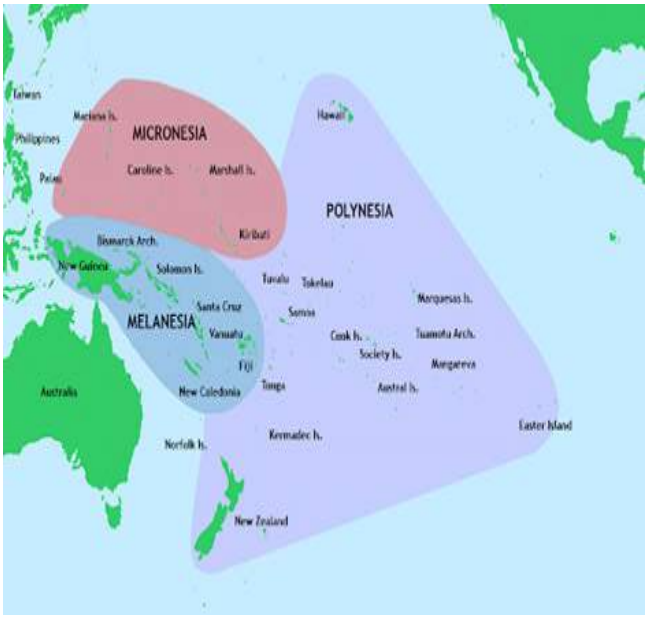


Image source: Wikipedia

Significance of Pacific Island Countries:

- Large Exclusive Economic Zones: As these countries have large EEZs they have a huge economic potential to utilise these EEZs which are rich in fisheries, energy, minerals and other marine resources.
  - These nations prefer to be regarded as the Big Ocean States, rather than the Small Island States.
  - Countries like Kiribati and the Federation States of Micronesia have EEZs larger than that of India.
- Strategic establishments: These island states in the past have played a crucial role in major power rivalry as they have been launchpads for establishing power projections and laboratories for developing and demonstrating strategic capabilities.
- Nuclear test sites: Due to the remoteness of these States from major population centres of the world, a few major nuclear weapon test centres of the nuclear powers such as the U.S., the U.K. and France were located in these countries.
  - Also, these island states acted as one of the major theatres of war during the Second World War — between Japan and the U S.
- Geopolitical influence: These 14 Pacific Island Countries are bonded together through shared economic and security concerns, and most importantly they account for a significant amount of votes in the United Nations and other international organisations and act as a vote bank for the major powers to mobilise international support.

China's interests in Pacific Island Countries:

- China is looking to enhance its relations with these island states as it does not have any historical connections with these countries, unlike the Western powers.
- The geostrategic location of these islands lies in the

natural line of the expansion of China's maritime interest and naval power.

* These countries are located beyond China's 'First Island Chain', which represents the country's first threshold of maritime expansion.
* China refers to this region as its 'Far Seas' and gaining control of it will make China an effective Blue Water capable Navy which is an essential prerequisite for becoming a superpower.

- China is also looking to build its relations with these countries to counter the rising influence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) which has emerged as a major force in the Indo-Pacific.
- The vast marine richness and the huge economic potential of these island states have also attracted China.
- The Taiwan Factor – The islands in the south Pacific are countries where China has competition from Taiwan for diplomatic recognition.
  * China sees Taiwan as a breakaway province awaiting reunification, therefore any country that has relations with China will have to sever ties with Taiwan.
  * Taking these island countries away from the West and Taiwan will make the goal of Taiwan's reunification easier for China.
  * China has succeeded in getting diplomatic recognition from 10 out of the 14 Pacific Island states through its economic assistance and at present only four of these countries namely Tuvalu, Palau, Marshall Islands and Nauru recognise Taiwan.

Implications of China's recent moves:

- Recently, the two draft documents prepared by China namely "China-Pacific Island Countries (PICs) Common Development Vision", and "China-Pacific Islands Five-Year Action Plan on Common Development (2022-2026)" have been leaked and have gained the attention of the international community.
  * The vision document deals with the proposal to improve cooperation in political, security, economic and strategic spheres.
  * The action plan document highlights specific details of cooperation in these identified areas.
- However, the Pacific Island Countries as a collective decision rejected China's extensive and ambitious proposals.
- The Prime Minister of the Federation States of Micronesia had written to all the island country governments to consider China's proposals with caution, as they can have negative implications on the sovereignty and unity of these island countries and may lead them into major power conflicts in the future.
- But experts feel that China is expected to come back with an improvised deal that is more acceptable and also this failure to get a consensus on the deal will not stop China from pursuing bilateral deals with individual countries of similar nature.
- This policy of China has cautioned the powers who have traditionally enjoyed a higher degree of influence in the region like the U.S. and Australia.
  * The U.S. is revisiting its diplomatic priority for the region ever since the China-Solomon Islands deal.
  * Also, the U.S. is said to have played a key role in mobilising opposition against China's proposed deal as the Federation States of Micronesia is the only nation which recognises China and is also part of the Compact of Free Association with the U.S. simultaneously.
  * Australia has sent its officials to these countries to revisit their ties and has promised due priority and assistance to these countries.

Nut Graf:

The geostrategic significance of Pacific Island Countries had attracted major powers of the colonial era to compete with each other to gain control of these states in the past and the recent moves by China in this context have alerted other major powers in the region and the leaders of these Pacific Island Countries.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries

12. China's interventions in the Horn of Africa

» Prelims: Horn of Africa

» Mains: Details about China's interests and its projects in the Horn of Africa and the significance of China's increased presence in the region.

Context:

- China and Horn of Africa's first Peace, Governance and Development Conference was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Horn of Africa:

- The North-Eastern region of Africa which includes countries like Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia is known as the Horn of Africa as these countries form a horn-like landmass over the Somali peninsula.
- A few sources also include parts or all of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda in the definition of Horn of Africa.
- This region is surrounded by the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean.

Image Source: Research Gate

China's Interests in the Horn of Africa:

- China's interests are mainly focused on four areas namely infrastructural projects, financial assistance, natural resources and maritime interests.
- Infrastructural projects
  - * China fully funded the $200 million African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.
  - * China has further made several investments in the railway sector like in the construction of the Addis-Djibouti railway line that provides connectivity to land-locked Ethiopia with the ports in the Red Sea.
  - * China has also invested in the Mombasa-Nairobi rail link in Kenya and has also helped with railway projects in Sudan. Further, it has constructed several infrastructural projects in Somalia, including hospitals, roads, schools and stadiums.
  - * In Djibouti, 14 infrastructural projects are funded by China.
  - * China also boasts of a profitable military hardware market in Ethiopia.
- Financial assistance
  - * In terms of financial assistance, Ethiopia is one of the top recipients of Chinese investments among African countries and Ethiopia also owes about $14 billion to China.
  - * China accounts for around 67% of Kenya's bilateral debt.
  - * In 2022, China vowed to extend a $15.7 million assistance package to Eritrea.
- Natural resources
  - * China's key interests include the abundant presence of oil and coal in the region.
  - * China has invested over $400 million in Mombasa's oil terminal (Kenya).
  - * China has also shown keen interest in other minerals like gold, iron ore, precious stones, chemicals, oil and natural gas in Ethiopia.
  - * China has been investing in South Sudan which is a rich source of petroleum products since 1995.
- Maritime interests
  - * China's first and only military base outside its mainland is in Djibouti.
  - * China has also shown its willingness to develop Eritrea's coast.
  - * The U.S. has speculated that China is looking to increase its military presence in the region by building military bases in Kenya and Tanzania.

Recent projects of China in the Horn of Africa:

- In January 2022, China's Foreign Minister reiterated China's focus on increasing the infrastructural investments in African countries and rejected the accusations of debt-trap diplomacy by China.
- China's Foreign Minister said that China's objectives in Africa include:
  - * Controlling the pandemic
  - * Implementing a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) outcomes
  - * Upholding common interests and fighting hegemonic politics.

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)

- The FOCAC was formed in 2000.
- Objective: Equal consultation, enhancing understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation.
- The FOCAC promotes China's role in the infrastructural and societal development of the Horn.
- There have been four FOCAC summits held to date and the latest one was held in 2021 in Dakar, Senegal.
- The four resolutions adopted to date include the Dakar Action Plan, the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, the Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change and the Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC.

- At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, China donated about 3,00,000 vaccines to Ethiopia and Uganda, and 2,00,000 vaccines to Kenya and Somalia.
    * China's vaccine diplomacy has also helped Sudan and Eritrea.
- China has also initiated the "China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035" with an aim to transform the health sector, alleviate poverty, improve trade and investments, and enhance digital innovation.
    * The vision also focuses on green development, capacity building, improving people-to-people exchanges and facilitating peace and security in the continent.

Response by the countries in the Horn of Africa to Chinese presence:

- Despite the worry of being surrounded by China's projects, the governments in Africa have largely shown interest in interacting with China.
- During the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian administration appreciated China for respecting Ethiopia's sovereignty.
- Further, Kenya has defended Chinese projects in the country and has held that the China-Africa partnership is mutually beneficial.
- Uganda also has said that China gives access to its markets, in a fashion similar to the U.S. or Europe.
- The East African Community (EAC) Secretary-General also held that the EAC would welcome Chinese investors to work in East Africa for the prosperity of the people.

Significance of China's interventions in the Horn of Africa:

- Peace and stability are mutual requirements for China and Africa.
    * For Africa, Chinese investments help to create a stable environment which could further help the countries achieve their peace and development objectives.
    * For China, conflict in the region comes at a heavy cost as several Chinese nationals are working in the region and the region also is very significant to China in terms of trade and revenue.
- China's move towards peace in Africa indicates a shift in its "principle of non-intervention".
- Also, the recent developments show that China is focussing on multifaceted growth in Africa. These interventions in the region help to project its status as a global leader.
- For Africa, China's presence is seen as an alternative to the Western and European powers which have been severely criticised by the African governments.
- These African countries have interacted better with countries like China and Russia as they do not conform to Western standards of democracy.

Nut Graf:

Through its extended interventions in the Horn of Africa, China has sent a message that it has set large objectives to achieve not just in the region but the whole of Africa. China's growing presence in the region will impact the flourishing India-Africa relations and require India to intensify its efforts to engage with Africa at the regional, bilateral and people-to-people levels.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries

13. Russia's gateway to global waters

» Prelims: Black sea

» Mains: The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca and the significance of the Black Sea to Russia

Context:

- Russia is trying to restrict Ukraine's access to its strategic waters.

The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca:

- The Treaty was signed in 1774 between the Russian and Ottoman Empires after the 1768-74 war between the two.
- The treaty is considered to have had a significant impact on the global balance of power in the 18th century.
- As part of the treaty, Russia got access to the Black Sea through the Kerch and Azov seaports.
- The treaty marked the start of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival of the Russians, under Catherine the Great, as a major power in the Black Sea region.
- Through this treaty, Russia also got the official status of being the protector of the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire.
    * This clause also meant that the Crimean Khanate, which had declared independence from the Ottomans, became dependent on Russia.
- In 1783, Prince Grigory Potemkin, a Grand Admiral in the imperial Russian army annexed the Crimean Peninsula in the name of protecting its Christians amidst violent clashes between Christians and Crimean Tatars.
    * The annexation guaranteed seamless access to the Black Sea's warm waters to Russia, thereby helping it become a strong naval power.
    * Many find parallels between the 18th century annexation of Crimea and the 2014 annexation

which helped Russia retain Sevastopol, which hosts its Black Sea fleet and uses Crimea as a platform for force projection.

Latest developments in Russia-Ukraine conflict:

- Post its full scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia has further tightened its grip over the Black Sea.
- Russia has gained control over the entire Sea of Azov coast and other port cities such as Mariupol, Berdyansk and Kherson.

Significance of Black Sea to Russia:

Image Source: The Hindu

- The Black Sea is important for Russia due to various geo-economic reasons
- Russia's ports in the Arctic Ocean do not guarantee its connectivity to the rest of the world.
  - * Russia's key gateway to the global waters is through the Black Sea, which opens into the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.
- At present, Russia's only naval base outside the erstwhile Soviet Union territories is located in Syria's Tartus in the Mediterranean Sea.
  - * Russia acknowledges the fact that the Mediterranean sea is currently dominated by NATO and is looking for ways to enhance its presence in the region.
  - * This makes it even more important for Russia to continue to retain its stronghold over the Black Sea.
- The Black Sea also plays a crucial role in Russia's economy as it provides the much needed connectivity for Russia to export its hydrocarbons and grains to Turkey and other Asian countries.
- During the Soviet period, Russia dominated the Black Sea, which was then regarded as the 'Soviet Lake'.
  - * Balck sea bordering countries such as Ukraine and Georgia were Soviet republics while Bulgaria and Romania were part of the Soviet-led Eastern bloc.
  - * The only country that was out of the Soviet sphere in the Black Sea region during the Cold War was Turkey and despite Turkey's control over Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, the 1936 Montreux Convention provided Russia and other Black Sea countries get access to the straits for both commercial and military purposes.
- The change in the balance of power post the breakdown of the Soviet Union has worked in the favour of NATO with Bulgaria and Romania joining NATO and Ukraine and Georgia also being offered NATO membership.
  - * However, Russia undertook a military intervention in Georgia which ended the country's NATO dream. And through the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has reasserted its influence over its southern waters.

Nut Graf

Considering the strategic and the geo-economic significance of the Black Sea to Russia and the shift in the balance of power in the region towards NATO, Russia is looking to retain its influence and control over the Black Sea through force.

Important places in news

14. Kaliningrad rail blockade

» Prelims: Kaliningrad

Context:

- Lithuania has imposed curbs on rail traffic to Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. In this context, Russia has criticized the move for being violative of legal obligations and has warned Lithuania of serious consequences.

Kaliningrad:

- Kaliningrad is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic Coast.
- After the conclusion of World War II, the Soviet Union was given control of the Kaliningrad territory at the Potsdam Conference. Post the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the territory remained part of the Russian Federation.

India and its neighbourhood- relations.

15. Indus Water Treaty

» Prelims: Facts about Indus Water Treaty

» Mains: Analysing the way forward for India-Pakistan relations in the light of changing trends of India's Neighbourhood Policy.

Context:

The 118th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) comprising the Indus Commissioners of India and Pakistan was held in New Delhi.

Historical background

- The Indus river basin consists of six rivers namely, Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.
- In 1947, the line of partition, for delineating geographical boundaries for India and Pakistan, cut the Indus river system into two.
- Since both the countries were dependent on water from the river basin there was a need for equitable distribution of water.
- The Indus water dispute was one of the key challenges that impacted relations between India and Pakistan post the partition as the line dividing the two countries cut across the Indus canal systems developed over centuries.
- The World Bank intervened and acted as a mediator between the two countries and resolved the deadlock.

Indus Water Treaty

- On the recommendations of the UN, the World Bank came up with the agreement in 1954 that was eventually signed in 1960.
- The Indian Prime Minister Nehru signed on behalf of India, Ayub Khan (President of Pakistan) signed on behalf of Pakistan, and William Iliff, the vice-president of the World Bank, on behalf of the Bank.
- According to the treaty, India got control over the three eastern rivers, namely:
  - Ravi
  - Beas
  - Sutlej
- Pakistan got control over the three western rivers, namely:
  - Indus
  - Chenab
  - Jhelum
- The treaty mandated both the countries to establish a Permanent Indus Commission constituted by permanent commissioners on both sides. The functions of the commission include,
  - Serving as a forum for exchange of information on the rivers, for continued cooperation
  - Act as the first stop for the resolution of conflicts.
- The treaty provides a three-step dispute resolution mechanism, under which
  - Issues can first be resolved at the commission level.
  - If the above step fails, either side can approach the World Bank to appoint a Neutral Expert (NE).
  - Finally, if either party is still not satisfied, matters can be referred to a Court of Arbitration.

Instances of objections raised by Pakistan under the treaty

- Pakistan's objections to India's Kishanganga Hydro Electricity Project (KHEP)
  - Kishanganga is a tributary of the Jhelum river.
  - The project was inaugurated in 2018, despite continued protests from Pakistan.
- Pakistan had objected to the Salal dam project in 1970 over design concerns, negotiations for which ended in 1978.
- Pakistan also opposed the Baglihar Hydropower project in the 2000s, which involved the construction of a 150m tall dam on Chenab.
  - The matter was eventually referred to a Neutral Expert who upheld some of Pakistan's objections while denying others.

Latest developments in India-Pakistan relations

- For a long time, the India-Pakistan Relation has spanned historic episodes of hostility and enmity. However, India has embraced a more friendly approach to its neighbourhood policy.
- The Government of India has sent consignments of wheat under the World Food Programme to Afghanistan through Pakistan.
- The channels of communication between India and Pakistan have opened up.
- The emerging ties between the countries can be observed in the political speeches of the leaders. For example, the Indian Prime Minister ceases to address Pakistan as an enemy country.
- India also opened backchannel talks with Pakistan, using the United Arab Emirates as an interlocutor.
- It is inferred that such a change has been driven by realist considerations that surfaced during the border skirmish in the Galwan region of Ladakh between India and China.
- During the aggression of Chinese forces in the Ladakh region, Pakistan refrained from mobilising its forces to the Line of Control as a result of the backchannel talks with India.

* This protected India's security from a nightmare scenario of enhanced border threats from both sides of China and Pakistan.

The roadmap ahead:

- It has been said that there are certain disputes that can be resolved with the aid of political will. These issues entail:
  * A deal on the Sir Creek dispute
  * An agreement for the revival of bilateral trade
  * Return of High Commissioners to the missions in Delhi and Islamabad.
  * Developing strong diplomatic ties
- There must be negotiations regarding the demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier which is seen to be off the table.
- A deeper understanding of the situation makes it obvious that the willingness expressed by New Delhi and Islamabad to revive the ties is accompanied by the restrictions imposed by Pakistan's domestic political instability and economic crisis.
- Therefore, the environment in Pakistan is not conducive to any advancements with India. However, there is always a doorway for India to revamp its diplomatic ties with Pakistan.

Nut graf:

A shift from the traditional hostility to the actions in favour of proper diplomatic and political engagements will be the cornerstone of reviving India-Pakistan ties despite the existing challenges. Such a developing tie is backed by sound reasons of serving the national interests and an effective neighbourhood policy.

Important International Institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

16. BRICS summit

» Prelims: BRICS

» Mains: Key outcomes of 14th BRICS Summit and the challenges to the functioning of BRICS

Context:

The 14th BRICS Summit was hosted by China in June 2022.

BRICS

- BRICS is an acronym for 5 emerging economies of the world which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- The term BRIC was coined by Jim O'Neil, the then chairman of Goldman Sachs in 2001.
- The grouping was formed in 2009 as the first BRIC summit took place in 2009 in Yekaterinburg (Russia).
- In 2010, South Africa formally joined the association making it BRICS.
- The primary purpose is to enhance economic and political cooperation among BRICS nations.
- BRICS established the New Development Bank in the year 2014.
  * It is headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- BRICS countries deliberate on important issues under the three pillars namely
  * Political and security
  * Economic and financial
  * Cultural and people-to-people exchanges

Key takeaways for the 14th BRICS Summit

- Aspects discussed: the leaders held discussions on the fields of Counter-Terrorism, Trade, Health, Traditional Medicine, Environment, Science, Technology & Innovation, Agriculture, Technical and Vocational Education & Training, and also key issues in the global context, including the reform of the multilateral system, COVID-19 pandemic, global economic recovery, amongst others.
- on Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The BRICS nations have urged for diplomacy and communication between Russia and Ukraine despite simmering geopolitical concerns.
- On economic Recovery post COVID pandemic: the coutries advocated for coordinated policy making and held the organisation is dedicated to advance macroeconomic policy coordination, deepen economic practical cooperation, and work toward a post-COVID economic recovery that is robust, sustainable, fair, and inclusive
- on World Peace: China criticised the "Cold War mentality and power politics" and urged for global peace and order.

- on Afghanistan - the leaders reiterated the need for an inclusive and representative government, and called for efforts to ensure that Afghan soil isn't used for attacks against other countries and provide shelter to terrorist groups.
- BRICS Plus - the countries agreed to push for expansion of the group to a "BRICS Plus", as it saw outreaches to Argentina, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Nigeria, Senegal and Thailand to attend development meetings.

India in the BRICS Summit

- The Prime Minister of India called for strengthening the BRICS identity and proposed the establishment of an Online Database for BRICS documents, the BRICS Railways Research Network, and strengthening cooperation between MSMEs.
- The Prime Minister also noted that the BRICS members should understand the security concerns of each other and provide mutual support in the designation of terrorists and this sensitive issue should not be politicized.
- The Prime Minister mainly focussed on the common agenda on economic governance, the importance of multilateral systems, and other BRICS initiatives- which he called "practical" initiatives

Challenges

- The BRICS economies share some domestic and socio-economic challenges that must be addressed independently of their group activism in order to accomplish their major goals as a group, viz. combating inequality (economic, social and political), corruption, improvements in health care and education, and human rights, to name a few.
- The BRICS members disagree on the inclusion of new UNSC permanent members.
- The nature of the group is rather China-centric. The four other countries in the BRICS grouping trade with China more than each other.
    * The sudden rise of China and its influence on global order has sparked concerns about its impact on multilateral groupings.
- Further the dynamics of the world order have changed since BRICS was founded in the backdrop of the global financial crisis, there is the phenomenal rise of China on the one hand and the face-off between Russia and the West in the form of the Ukraine conflict.
- Indian goals are better served by bilateral relations than by multilateral groupings.
- BRICS members don't discuss bilateral issues like the India-China border dispute which are bound to have an impact on BRICS solidarity in the long run.

Way Forward

- The BRICS countries should work towards the diplomatic and peaceful resolution of crises and conflicts.
- It needs to continue its work, as an essential platform in sectors like urban planning, academia, anti-terrorism measures, water management, policy coordination, and higher education.
- It will deliver considerable benefits for its members.
- BRICS also needs to promote the democratization of international issues, which will lead to the widest and equal participation of all stakeholders.

> ***Nut graf:***
>
> *The 14th BRICS summit gained a lot of attention and significance as it was held at a time of ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and discussions were focused on issues such as multilateral system reform, combating the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic recovery.*

Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

17. G7 Summit

» Prelims: About G7

» Mains: Key outcomes of the G7 summit and its significance to India

Context:

G7 annual summit 2022.

What is G7?

- The G7 or the Group of Seven is an informal group of world's "most industrialised" countries namely Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- The Group was formed in 1975 in the backdrop of the 1973 energy crisis.
- Together the member countries represent 40% of global GDP and 10% of the world's population.
- Unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has no legal existence, permanent secretariat, or official members.
- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries, in turn, each year. The country holding the presidency is responsible for organizing and hosting the meeting.

48th G7 annual summit

- Recently, the 48th G7 Summit was held in Germany.
- Germany holds the presidency of the G7 in 2022 and has invited India, along with Australia, the Republic of Korea, and South Africa, as Guest Countries for the G7 Summit.

- The Prime Minister of India attended the summit along with leaders from Argentina, Indonesia, Senegal, and South Africa as special invitees.

Key outcomes of the summit

- The launch of a $600 billion worth Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII).
  - This initiative is said to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative
  - The initiative aims to fund projects aimed at bettering a wide range of infrastructure such as roads and harbours in far-flung corners of the world
- Commitments to tackling climate change.
  - G-7 leaders are expected to work with partners to establish a "Climate Club"
  - This also includes funding renewable energy sources
- Efforts were also undertaken to mitigate the rising inflation and manage the global economic crisis caused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The summit also highlighted the challenges to the international order like the impact on energy markets and cybersecurity resulting due to the Russia-Ukraine war.
  - The G7 leaders also talked about tightening sanctions on Russia.
- The G7 leaders also discussed the challenges of China's expansive maritime claims, human rights violations, and its debt-trap diplomacy in lower-income countries.
- The summit also resulted in the issue of statements regarding resilient democracies, commitment to free and fair elections, safeguarding freedom of expression, and gender empowerment.

India in the G7 summit

- The Prime Minister of India said that the developing countries would need increased support in addressing the ripple effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- India also sought to distance itself from the PGII initiative which is regarded as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative.
  - Earlier in the BRICS summit, India had stayed away from Russia and China's strong criticism of the West.
- The Indian government has also clarified that India had signed only those statements on "Resilient Democracies" and "Just Energy Transition", and not other statements which are against Russia and China.
  - India once again clarified its position on the conflict in Ukraine amid pressure from the Western countries at the G7 summit.
- The Indian Prime Minister, at the summit, also offered the G7 countries to invest in India's emerging green and clean energy market.

> ***Nut graf:***
>
> *India's attendance in the latest G7 summit amid the existing geopolitical complexities and uncertainties has gained significance as India continues its 'walk the tightrope' approach and looks to protect its national interests and preserve its relations with the countries of the West as well as with Russia.*

Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's Interests.

18. Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment

» Prelims: PGII

» Mains: Significance of PGII for India

Context:

- Recently, at the 48th G-7 Summit, the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) was unveiled.

Details:

- The Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment was unveiled by the U.S. President and G7 allies from Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan and the European Union.
- The PGII is being seen as the G7's counter to China's multi-trillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build connectivity, infrastructure, and trade projects in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America.
- PGII is envisioned as a "values-driven, high-impact, and transparent infrastructure partnership to meet the enormous infrastructure needs of low and middle-income countries
- The initiative aims to raise $600 billion by 2027 for global infrastructure programmes in developing and middle-income countries.

Main pillars of the initiative:

- Addressing the climate crisis and ensuring global energy security through clean energy supply chains
- Bolstering digital information and communications technology (ICT) networks by facilitating technologies such as 5G and 6G internet connectivity and cybersecurity
- Advancing gender equality and equity
- Developing global health infrastructure

Difference between PGII and China's BRI:

- While, PGII aims to build projects through grants and investments, China builds BRI's projects by extending large, low-interest loans to countries that have to usually be paid over 10 years.
- Unlike China's state-run BRI initiative, this proposed G7 funding would depend largely on private companies being willing to commit to massive investments and is therefore not guaranteed.
- While G7 leaders emphasized 'transparency' as the cornerstone of PGII projects, the BRI has faced criticism for making countries sign confidential tenders for extending massive loans, leaving countries indebted to China.

ART AND CULTURE

Indian Heritage and Culture, Salient aspects of Art Forms

1. Jyotirgamaya Festival

» Prelims: World Music Day, Jyotirgamaya Festival and Sangeet Natak Akademi

Context:

- On the occasion of World Music Day, Jyotirgamaya Festival was organised.

Jyotirgamaya Festival:

- Jyotirgamaya Festival is organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi
- Jyotirgamaya is a unique festival organised to showcase the talent of rare musical instruments from across the country, including street performers, train entertainers, performers attached to temples, etc.
- The festival aims to spread awareness about the need to protect the craft of making and the skill of playing rare musical instruments, and to provide a platform to 'unheard' artists.

Sangeet Natak Akademi:

- Sangeet Natak Akademi was established in 1953 with the objective of preserving and promoting the vast intangible heritage of India's diverse culture expressed in forms of music, dance and drama.
- It is the apex body in the field of performing arts in the country
- It is an autonomous body working under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture.
- The Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi is appointed by the President of India for a term of five years.
- The registered office of the Akademi is at Rabindra Bhavan.
- The Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards are the highest national recognition conferred to artists.

Indian Heritage and Culture

2. National Monuments Authority

» Prelims: About National Monuments Authority

Context:

- A team from National Monuments Authority (NMA) to visit Arunachal Pradesh to identify new additions to the list of Centrally Protected Monuments from the state.

National Monuments Authority (NMA):

- National Monuments Authority (NMA) is set up under the Ministry of Culture
- It has been established based on the provisions of Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains AMASR (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010
- Objective: protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated area around the centrally protected monuments
- Functions:
  - * Recommend the Central Government on the grading and classification of protected monuments and protected areas declared as of national importance
  - * Monitor and assess working of the competent authorities
  - * Suggest measures for the implementation of the provisions of the Act
  - * Undertake impact assessment of large-scale development projects such as public projects in the regulated areas
  - * To recommend actions to the competent authority for grant of permission
- NMA has been mandated to categorize all the protected monuments and protected areas declared as of National importance as per provision of Section 20 I of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010.

Indian Art and Culture – salient aspects of architecture

3. International Yoga Day Celebrations

» Prelims: Facts associated with the places/monuments

Context:

- The 8th International Day of Yoga was celebrated in different parts of the country and the world. In India, the PM led the celebrations from the Mysore Palace Grounds, Mysuru.
- The significance of some of the places where the celebrations were held is discussed.

Gwalior Fort:

- The Gwalior Fort was originally built in the fifth century CE or perhaps even earlier in present-day Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh.
- It has been held by many dynasties like the Hunas, the Gurjara – Pratiharas, the Kachchhapaghatas, the Tomars, the Lodis and the Mughals.
- The Fort was also sieged by Mahmud of Ghazni for 4 days.

- Tomar ruler Maan Singh had commissioned many monuments within the Fort.
- Mughal Emperor Akbar had used this Fort as a prison for political prisoners.
- In 1780, the British captured the Fort from the Marathas.
- In 1844, the Maratha Scindias took control of the Fort as a protectorate of the British government.
- During the Indian Revolt of 1857, 6500 sepoys who were stationed at the Gwalior Fort joined the rebels, which prompted the British to regain control of the Fort in 1858.
- After 1886, it was handed over to the Scindias as the Fort no longer held any significance for the British. The Scindias held it till independence.

Red Fort:

- The Red Fort was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1648.
- It is made up of red sandstone and marble and reportedly took nine years to complete.
- It was also known as the Qila-i-Mubarak.

Modhera Sun Temple:

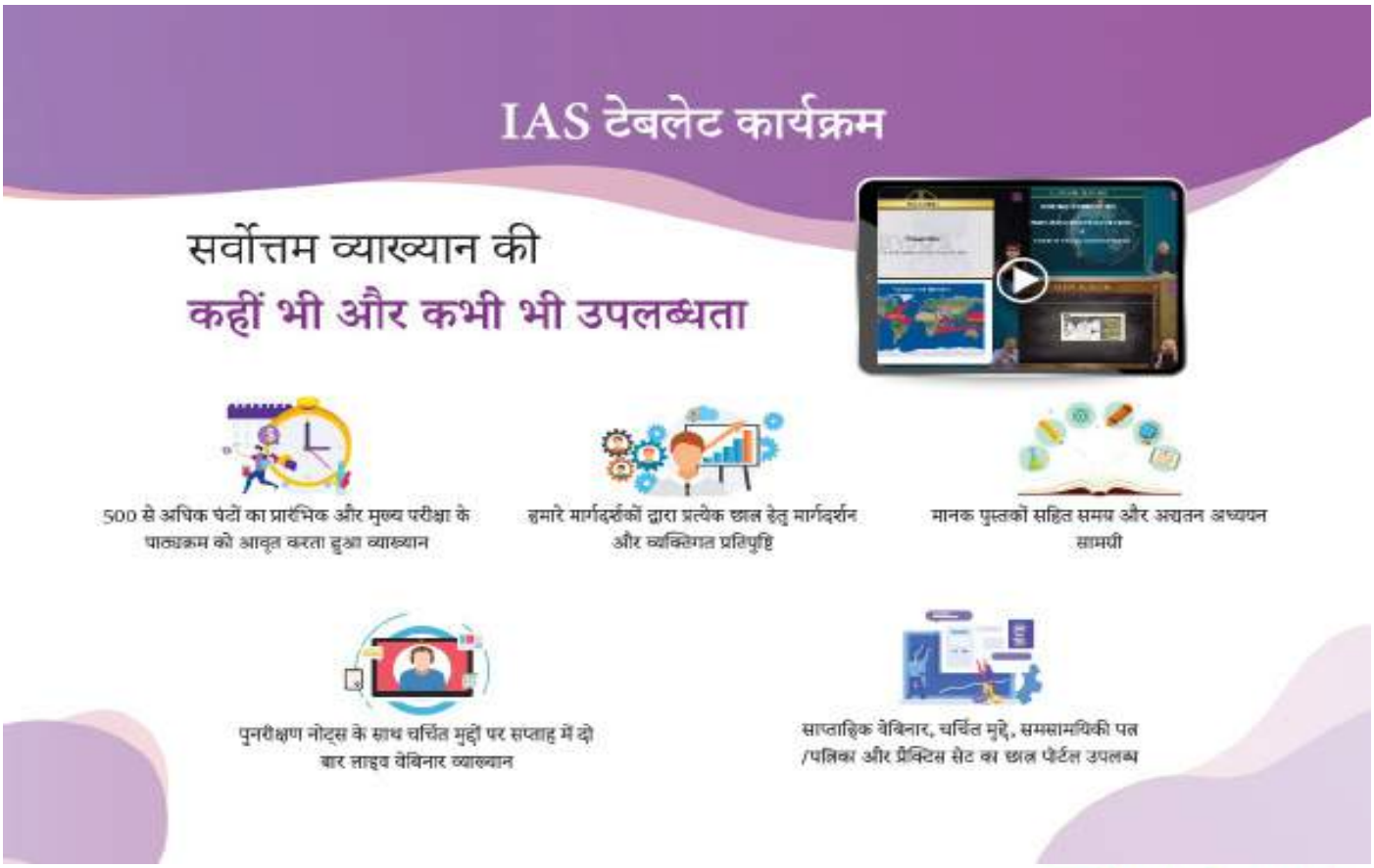
- The Sun Temple at Modhera in Gujarat's Mehsana district was built after 1026-27 CE during the reign of Bhima I of the Chaulukya dynasty.
- The temple, dedicated to the Sun God, is now a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India.
- The temple is built in the Māru-Gurjara style (Chaulukya style).

Kangra Fort:

- Located in Kangra in Himachal Pradesh, it is one of the oldest forts in India.
- The fort's ownership changed hands many times and in the early 19th century, it came under the Sikh empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- After the Anglo-Sikh war of 1846, it was taken over by the British.

Nalanda Mahavihara:

- Nalanda Mahavihara was an ancient Indian university in Nalanda, Bihar that attracted students from all over and outside the country as well.
- It was built by Kumargupta I of the Gupta dynasty in the 5th century CE.
- It received the patronage of kings and rulers for about 800 years.
- It admitted students only after a rigorous selection process. The subjects taught were Buddhist studies, logic, science, philosophy, medicine, grammar, etc.
- Many texts composed at the university influenced the development of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.
- The university was destroyed by the troops of Bakhtiyar Khilji in about 1200 CE. It was partly restored and continued to exist till about 1400 CE.
- In 2016, the remains of the Nalanda Mahavihara received the UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.

1. Petty patents

» Prelims: Global Innovation Index

» Mains: Concerns in India's R&D segment and recommendations

Context

- India has been ranked 46th in WIPO's Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2021.
- There has been a constant improvement in India's ranking over the years. India had been ranked 81 in 2015.

Significance of R&D sector:

- A vibrant R&D sector would help ensure much needed self-reliance in technology for India.
- A robust R&D sector can provide much needed impetus to economic growth and development in India. Innovative activity is the key driver of competitiveness and economic growth. It can provide employment opportunities and also provide an competitive edge to Indian companies in the global market.

Concerns in India's R&D segment:

- Gross R&D expenditure (GERD) as a percentage of GDP is 0.7% which is very low as compared to other comparable countries.
- The R&D expenditure is mainly from the government with only about 30% of the GERD being spent by business enterprises. Also, the bulk of innovative activity is conducted by a handful of companies in the pharma and auto sectors. This is indicative of the lack of R&D culture among Indian enterprises. Also, this leads to the lack of innovative rivalry which has been able to spur innovations as well as economic growth in countries like the U.S.
- Though the number of patent filings has been increasing, the patents granted continue to remain low. It has been observed that many patent applications fail to satisfy the three-pronged test of novelty, inventive step and utility.

Recommendations:

Raise expenditure in R&D segment:

- India needs to raise Gross R&D expenditure (GERD) as a percentage of GDP to upwards of 2% of GDP, as observed in the leading innovative nations.

Supportive policy:

- The governments both at the Union and state level must support and incentivize R&D activities through policies such as weighted tax deductions, partial funding for specific R&D projects undertaken by business enterprises.
- Notably, subsidies up to 50% of project costs have been made non-actionable under the World Trade Organization rules.
- Also, products based on indigenously developed technology could be given production tax concessions and income tax concessions be given to innovators to encourage innovation.

Flexible patent system:

- A major challenge with the current patent system is that it fails to encourage minor innovations since the criteria for granting IP rights considers the novelty of the invention while overlooking minor adaptive innovations.
- An important intervention to protect minor innovations and to promote local innovation could be to consider the so-called utility models or petty patents.
- Petty patents regime provides protection to minor incremental innovation. They provide a limited period of protection (5-10 years in contrast to 20 years in case of patents). But more importantly they have less stringent requirements and procedures.
- The petty patents would encourage domestic enterprises to undertake minor adaptive innovations paving the way for more significant innovations by them in the future. This augurs well for the growth of R&D segment in India.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *Boosting the R&D culture among business enterprises to strengthen their competitiveness is an urgent imperative for India to not only ensure speedy economic growth but also ensure economic development and ensure self-reliance.*

Awareness in the fields of Artificial Intelligence Technology

2. A new global standard for AI ethics

» Mains: Concerns associated with AI; UNESCO's recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think like humans and mimic their actions.
- Artificial Intelligence is an emerging technology that facilitates intelligence and human capabilities of sense, comprehend, and act with the use of machines.

Concerns associated with AI:

- The data set used to feed AI systems aren't representative enough and often produce outcomes that can be biased or discriminatory towards certain sections of society like women and darker-skinned people. This is evident in the large biases observed in facial recognition technologies that have led to wrongful arrests in some cases.
- Also, there is wide inequality in terms of representation in the design and development segment of AI technologies. Only one in 10 software developers worldwide is a woman and most of these women come from western countries.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence:

- In November 2021, 193 countries reached an agreement at UNESCO on the ethical use of Artificial Technology (AI). UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence deals with how AI should be designed and used by governments and tech companies.
- The concerned countries have agreed to implement UNESCO's recommendation.

Major recommendations:

- The recommendations emphasize more inclusive participation of all groups in the entire life cycle of AI technology, ranging from research, design and development to deployment and use.
- It calls for the proper management of data and privacy concerns. Appropriate and adequate safeguards must be ensured for processing of sensitive data and effective accountability, and redress mechanisms must be provided for.
- It prioritizes handing the control over data in the hands of users and allowing them to access and delete information as needed.
- AI systems should not be used for social scoring or mass surveillance purposes.

Applications of AI:

- Artificial intelligence finds applications in multiple disciplines including weather analysis, medical technology, education among many others.

Nut Graf

India needs to have an AI strategy which can effectively promote ethical AI use without compromising the desire to be on the cutting edge of new technologies. India needs to place human interests first and before the commercial interests associated with the application of AI technology.

Intellectual Property Rights

3. The Indian Patent Regime

» Prelims: TRIPS, WTO

» Mains: Analysing India's Patent norms.

Context:

- The US Trade Representative has raised concerns about the patent regime followed by India.

Overviewing the situation:

- The US Trade Representative (USTR) in its report Special 301 on Intellectual Property Protection and Enforcement has stated the impediments posed by the Indian patent regime that interferes with trade interests.
- This report offers an annual assessment of the effectiveness of the trading partners of the US in terms of enforcement of intellectual property rights.
- India will remain on the Priority Watchlist of the US along with six other countries such as Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia and Venezuela.

Why is India on the Priority Watchlist of the USTR?

- The USTR, after carrying out a profound analysis of the progress made by its trading partners to improve the IP norms, emphasised the following issues pertaining to India:
  - India's inconsistencies regarding patent protection
  - Existing concerns surrounding the contents that can be patented
  - Waiting time for obtaining patents
  - Cumbersome reporting requirements
  - Concerns regarding the data safety

Patent Regime in India:

- A patent can be defined as the exclusive set of rights granted for an invention, which can be a product or process that offers a new way of doing certain things, involving innovation and possessing originality.
- In India, patents are governed by the provisions of the Indian Patents Act 1970.
- Initially, the Indian Patents Act did not provide patent protection on pharmaceutical products for the better availability of medicines at a lower rate.
- Patent protection on pharmaceutical products was introduced after the 2005 amendment to the law to form compliance with TRIPS agreement.
- Article 3 (d) of the Indian Patents Act offers an insight into the landscape of Indian intellectual property law and the areas of its alignment to the American patent laws along with the areas where the laws differ for both the countries.

- This article of the Indian Patents Act also prevents mere discoveries of new property or new use for a known substance with a considerable increase in efficacy compared to the existing methods from being patented. This prevents the evergreening of patents.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee pointed out that the provision under Article 3 (d) of the Indian Patents Act allows generic competition by patenting only novel and genuine inventions.
- With the gradual progress of time, India has put enormous efforts to form an alignment with the global mandate regarding intellectual property rights.
- India became a party to the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement.
- India also became a member of the WTO in January 1995.
- The Government of India has been a signatory to various conventions related to IPR.

Conventions to which India is a signatory:

- Berne Convention – This is for the protection of literary and artistic works which was adopted in 1886. It is based on three principles:
  * Principle of national treatment
  * Principle of automatic protection
  * Principle of independence of protection
- The Budapest Treaty – It was adopted in 1977 and is concerned with a specific topic in the international patent process on microorganisms. The treaty explains the norms of international recognition of the deposit of microorganisms for the purpose of patent procedure. All signatory states are obliged to recognise the norms of the treaty.
- The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property – It was adopted to establish a framework for industrial property in the widest sense. The convention sets up norms for patents, trademarks, industrial designs, utility models, service marks, trade names, geographical indications, and the repression of unfair competition. This was a significant international agreement to ensure the inventors that their works are protected in other countries. This convention is open to all states. The instrument of ratification/accession must be deposited with the Director-General of WIPO.
- The Patent Cooperation Treaty – It acts as an international patent law to assist applicants in seeking patent protection internationally for their inventions. It also facilitates patent offices with their patent grating decisions along with public access to a wealth of technical information relating to those inventions.

The Way Ahead:

- It was concluded in the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS agreement that India must not compromise on the patentability criteria under the provisions of the Indian Patents Act since as a sovereign country it has the flexibility to stipulate limitations on grants of patents which is in consonance with the socio-economic conditions.
- It is suggested that the differences between India and the US on the disqualification of incremental inventions must be resolved through a bilateral dialogue.
- Besides, the Parliamentary Standing Committee has reviewed the general issues regarding IPR norms in India and submitted its report to both the houses of the Parliament.
- Therefore, certain issues like threat of patent revocations, lack of presumption of patent validity and the existing narrow patentability criteria must be addressed.

Nut Graf

The report released by the USTR elaborates on certain challenges existing in the patent regime of India which make the process of patenting complicated. However, it is suggested that India, as a sovereign country, must retain its flexibility in regulating the norms of intellectual property rights.

Awareness in the fields of Space

4. International Liquid Mirror Telescope

» Prelims: About International Liquid Mirror Telescope (ILMT)

Context:

- The world's first liquid mirror telescope has been set up in Devasthal.

International Liquid Mirror Telescope:

- The world's first Liquid Mirror Telescope was installed at the Devasthal Observatory of the Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) in Nainital, Uttarakhand which is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology.
- ILMT will be the third telescope to be operating from Devasthal after the Devasthal Optical Telescope (DOT) [the largest in India commissioned in 2016] and the Devasthal Fast Optical Telescope (DFOT) inaugurated in 2010.
- This telescope will help in making sky surveys and obtain images that can help observe transient phenomena such as asteroids, and supernovae and record the presence of space debris or meteorites.
- ILMT has been constructed by a collaboration of scientists from Canada, Belgium and India.
  * It was designed and built at the Advanced Mechanical and Optical Systems Corporation and the Centre Spatial de Liege, Belgium.

- The first image made by the telescope consisted of several stars and a galaxy, NGC 4274, which is 45 million light-years away.
- ILMT has a primary mirror that is liquid and cannot be turned and pointed in any direction.
    * The telescope basically stares at the zenith and watches the sky as the earth rotates, thereby giving a view of different objects.
    * This property can be used to scan and survey the sky, and observe transients and moving objects such as meteorites.
- A large pool of mercury is placed in a vessel that is spun around so fast that it curves into a parabolic shape. Since mercury is reflective, this shape helps in focusing the reflected light. A thin layer of mylar is used to protect the mercury from the wind.

Developments in Science and Technology

5. Can the new Google chatbot be sentient?

» Mains: Issues related to Developments in Science and Technology

Context:

- Google's advanced conversational agent called Language Model for Dialogue Applications (LaMDA) has a neural network making it capable of deep learning.

Details:

- LaMDA is an abbreviated form of 'Language Model for Dialogue Applications', Google's advanced conversational agent with a neural network capable of deep learning.
- LaMDA is a non-goal-directed chatbot which can have dialogues on various subjects.
- It has the potential to revolutionize customer interaction and AI-enabled internet search.
- The tech giant claims that the advanced software can make sense of nuanced conversation and engage in a natural conversation.
- LaMDA relies on pattern recognition, not empathy, wit, candour or intent.

What is a neural network?

- It is an AI tech that tries to mimic the network of neurons in the brain to learn and behave like human beings.
- The artificial neural network (ANN)requires training as a pet dog prior to being commanded. For example, thousands of specific cat images are broken down to pixels and fed into the ANN during the image recognition training.
- Its algorithm has been trained using 1.56 trillion words of public dialogue data and web text on diverse topics
- The AI tech learns to recognise the key patterns that specify what a general 'cat' looks like from these characteristics.
- With access to big data and a powerful processor, it is enough for the emerging deep learning software to do impossible looking tasks.
- Blake Lemoine, a U.S. military veteran, was engaged in this project to test for bias/hate speech in the Language Model for Dialogue Applications (LaMDA).
- He asserts that with deep learning capacity the neural network has the consciousness of a child of seven or eight years old, although Google and several tech experts have denied the claim.

LaMDA vs other chatbots

- Chatbots like 'Ask Disha' of the IRCTC, routinely used for customer engagement, have a repertoire of topics and chat responses are narrow. The conversations are predefined and mostly goal-directed. LaMDA has been developed as a non-goal directed chatbot that converses on various subjects.
- For example, it can converse like a family over the dinner table on topics ranging from the taste of the food to price rise to war in Ukraine.
- Therefore, it could revolutionize customer interaction and help AI-enabled internet search.

How far and intelligent is AI technology?

- Although the AI technology appears futuristic, we do have Facebook's facial recognition software, voice recognition software like Alexa, and the Google Translate app in front of us.
- The AI technologies take inspiration from the mathematician Alan Turing's answer to the question 'Can a machine think?'.
- Turing was the pioneer of the world's first computer, ENIGMA, which broke the German codes during the Second World War.

Issues with the AI technology:

- The challenges of AI changing into sentient are far in the future; however, unethical AI carrying historical bias further and enabling easy hate speeches are the real dangers.
- Recently Google fired Timnit Gebru over her warnings on their unethical AI and now this development rightly caused ripples in social media.
- The issue of equity and equality in future benefit programmes may put the women and marginalized communities in the discriminated arena.
- AI tech learning from historical data may inadvertently perpetuate discrimination let alone the issue of bias which we are ignoring.

Way Forward:

- According to Robert A. Heinlein "Everything is theoretically impossible until it is done". This is true for the dynamic space of AI, Robotics and other similar domains. Therefore while making progress in these fields we need to balance the human-machine interface to save ourselves from falling prey to this necessary evil of the modern age.

Science and Technology developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

6. New development in solid-state lithium metal batteries

» Prelims: Lithium-Ion Batteries and solid state batteries

» Mains: Challenges with the conventional lithium-ion batteries and key solutions

Context:

- DST-IISc energy storage platform moves towards enabling fast-charging solid-state batteries.

Details:

- Researchers from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have reported on an innovative interfacial engineering approach to enable fast charge-discharge rates in solid-state lithium metal batteries.
- They have found that nanoscopic refractory metal layers like Tungsten could improve the performance of these batteries which are crucial for purposes like electrical mobility.

Solid state batteries:

- Conventional Li-ion batteries employ a graphite anode, a liquid electrolyte, and a transition metal cathode.
- However, the liquid electrolytes are flammable and degrade at high temperatures leading to poor battery life and in extreme cases lead to battery fires.
- Replacing the liquid electrolyte in a conventional Li-ion battery with a ceramic solid electrolyte and simultaneously replacing the graphite anode with a metallic lithium anode could enable safer Li-ion batteries that also last longer on a single charge.
- However, a long-standing challenge with solid-state batteries is the growth of lithium dendrites that short circuits the cells and this is accentuated during fast charging.

How the researchers overcame this:

- Based on extensive fundamental electrochemical measurements performed over several hundreds of solid-state half cells and subsequent nano-characterization, the researchers realized that dendrite growth was a manifestation of a deeper fundamental process: diffusive growth of lithium voids that are forming during discharge.
- The researchers identified that the growth of lithium voids during discharge leads to dendrite growth during charge.
- The researchers noted that tungsten is an ideal candidate to impede lithium vacancy motion due to its low solubility for lithium and therefore delay void growth. They collaborated with researchers from Carnegie Mellon University to corroborate their work through computational methods.
- The team now intends to build on this advance to develop full solid-state cells that could enable charging in less than an hour, and offer up to 1000 or more cycles while withstanding high temperatures of 45 °C or higher outcompeting conventional Li-ion cells at a cost that is at par or lower than the cost of conventional Li-ion cells.

DEFENCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY

Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

1. UN report on the Taliban regime

» Mains: Security challenges for India vis-à-vis Afghanistan

Context:

- A recently released report from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) says that foreign terrorist organisations continue to enjoy safe haven under the new Taliban regime.
- The report also says, that due to financial constraints, and possibly under political pressure not to embarrass the Taliban internationally at this juncture, the terrorist groups are currently in consolidation mode and not likely to launch major attacks outside Afghanistan before 2023.

Concerns for India:

Taliban's internal tussle:

- The foremost internal division in the Taliban is between the moderate and the hardline blocs. While the moderate bloc wants working relationships with foreign partners and integration with the international system, the hardliners (consisting of senior Taliban leaders centralized around Hibatullah Akhundzada) have a more ideological stance, with little interest in international relations.
- Independent of both these blocs is the Haqqani Network which, while more aligned with the hardliners, is inclined towards a pragmatic rather than ideological approach to securing Taliban interests.
- According to the report, under the command of Hibatullah, various Taliban factions are manoeuvring for advantage, with the Haqqani Network cornering most of the influential posts in the administration.
- The Kandahari (Durrani) Taliban is in the ascendancy among the Taliban leadership, with Pashtuns getting precedence over non-Pashtuns.
- Several key Tajik and Uzbek commanders in the north have been replaced with Pashtuns from the south, and these decisions have come against the backdrop of an "organized campaign by Pashtuns to dislodge ethnic Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek communities from rich agricultural land in the north".
- Internal cohesion within the Taliban was easier to maintain during the insurgency period, when there was a "compelling common cause to expel foreign forces from Afghanistan". Now that they are in power, "the Taliban's core identity of a Pashtun nationalist cause dominated by southern Taliban has again come to the fore, generating tension and conflict with other ethnic groups."

Presence of Foreign Terrorists:

- Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) constitutes the largest component of foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, with their numbers estimated at 3,000 to 4,000 and operating along the east and southeast Afghanistan – Pakistan border areas.
- The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant Khorasan (ISILK) has grown in strength through prison releases and new recruitments.
- Al-Qaeda still has a relationship with the Taliban and is renewing its pledge of allegiance to Taliban leader Hibatullah.
- However, neither ISILK nor Al-Qaeda are capable of mounting international attacks before 2023 but their presence, along with the presence of other terrorist groups on Afghan soil, remains a matter of concern for neighbouring countries and the international community.

India-focussed Terrorist Groups:

- The report also highlights the threat of India-focused terrorist groups. According to the report, two India-focused terrorist groups, Jaish-i-Mohammed (JiM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), are reported to have training camps in Afghanistan. Both the groups enjoy close links with the Taliban leadership, with the LeT having a history of providing finance and training expertise to Taliban operations.
- The Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has 180400 fighters in Afghanistan. "Fighters included nationals from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan."
- However, AQIS capabilities were weakened from losses as a result of the October 2015 joint United States Afghan raid in Kandahar's Shorabak district and financial constraints.
- The name change of the AQIS magazine from 'Nawa-i-Afghan-Jihad' to 'Nawa-e-Gazwah-e-Hind' suggests a "refocussing of AQIS from Afghanistan to Kashmir".

Nut Graf:

Despite the Taliban's pledge not to allow the use of Afghan land for terror activities, Afghanistan is still a safe haven for terrorist threats to the international community including India.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

2. SIPRI yearbook

» Mains: Global Trends in military spending and Key developments/concerns flagged by the SIPRI yearbook

Context:

- Recently, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its yearbook highlighting some worrying trends of the past year in international security. Read more on the SIPRI Yearbook 2021.

Trends in military spending:

- During 2012-2021, military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has largely been stable.
- Russia leads the charge in absolute numbers of nuclear inventory, however, it is the U.S. that has the largest number of deployed warheads.
- The U.K. has 225 nuclear weapons in its inventory, while France has 290, China has 350, India has 160, and Pakistan has 165. Israel is estimated to have 90 and North Korea 20.
- It is concerning to see how global discourse has created a sense of fear around China's military modernisation and its upward trend in nuclear weapons development.
- Besides, thousands of nuclear weapons held by the U.S. don't seem to attract a similar level of attention.

What about global arms imports?

- Military modernisation is seen to be a global trend. All nuclear weapon-owning states have stated and worked upon their intention to modernize multiple facets of their armed forces.
- The yearbook has highlighted India as being the top weapons importer during the 2017-2021 period. Other countries to feature in the top five arms importers list include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China, and Australia.
- According to SIPRI, these five nation-states account for 38% of total global arms imports.

Key developments/concerns flagged by the yearbook:

- The yearbook mentions low-level border clashes between India and Pakistan, the civil war in Afghanistan, and the armed conflict in Myanmar as some of the worrying indicators of an unstable system.
- It also highlighted three causes of concern trends:
  - Chinese-American rivalry, involvement of state actors in conflicts
  - non-state actors in multiple conflicts
  - The challenge that climatic and weather hazards pose.
- It is important to note here that the threat posed by climate change seems to feature in the report only nominally.
- The marginal downsizing observed in the nuclear arsenal has come mostly from the U.S. and Russia dismantling retired warheads.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised some serious eyebrows because of the continuous rhetoric from the Kremlin over not shying away from the use of nuclear weapons.
- China's recent activities surrounding the construction of 300 new nuclear missile silos have also been turning heads.
- Over in the subcontinent, India and Pakistan seem to be making gains over their nuclear arsenal while also looking at the development and procurement of newer and more efficient forms of delivery systems.

Conclusion:

- The muscular military policies of nations coupled with the continuous use of rhetoric that fuels public sentiment over the state's use of military assets make conditions ripe for the situation to further deteriorate.
- A strong political opposition would be needed to help keep the ruling dispensation in check. Furthermore, the two largest nuclear weapons-holding states need to take on a more engaging role in the international arena.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *The recent geopolitical events transpiring around the world in practically all regions have made the global security climate more unstable. It is further aided by actions of authoritarian leaders of not just non-democratic systems but also of strongmen leaders of democratic systems. SIPRI's yearbook forces us to look critically at how the global disarmament project seems to be going.*

Defence equipment/platforms of India

3. Agni-4 missile

» Prelims: Agni-IV

Context:

- India successfully tested the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) Agni-4, which met all parameters.

Agni-4:

- Agni-4 is an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile.
- Agni-IV is the fourth in the Agni series of missiles – earlier known as Agni II prime – developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO).
- The missile is a two-stage weapon system and is road-mobile.
- The Agni-5 is India's only Inter-continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) with a range of over 5,000 km.

Significance of Agni-4:

- Agni-4 reaffirms India's policy of having a "credible minimum deterrence" capability.
  - * The principle of credible minimum deterrence underpins India's nuclear strategy. It emphasizes no first use with an assured second-strike capability and falls under minimal deterrence.

Defence equipment/platforms

4. Apache, Chinook choppers

» Prelims: Apache and Chinook choppers

Context:

- India is in talks for more Apache and Chinook choppers.

Apache choppers:

- Apache is an attack helicopter that is regarded as the world's most lethal helicopter.
- The helicopter was first introduced to the US army in 1986.
- The helicopter is manufactured by Boeing
- AH-64E is an upgraded version of the Apache attack helicopter.
- These helicopters can hover and can precisely target and mow down even man-sized targets with things like millimetre radar and night vision
- Apache choppers are equipped with FIM 92 Stinger and AGM-114 Hellfire Missiles

Chinook choppers:

- The CH-47 F(I) "Chinook" is an advanced multi-mission helicopter that was manufactured by Boeing
- It was introduced in 1962 and took part in many operations in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iran. It is said to be one of the most advanced heavy-lift helicopters in the world.
- It is an advanced multi-mission helicopter and it contains features such as a fully integrated, digital cockpit management system, Common Avionics Architecture System (CAAS) Cockpit and advanced cargo-handling capabilities that complement the aircraft's mission performance and handling characteristics.
- The chopper can carry a payload of 9.6 tonnes including heavy machinery such as artillery guns, howitzers, and even light armored vehicles.
  - * This capacity can be used for rescue operations, disaster relief, aircraft recovery, and parachute drops.

Defence equipment/platform

5. Prithvi-II

» Prelims: Prithvi missile

Context:

- A successful training launch of a Short-Range Ballistic Missile, Prithvi-II was carried out in June 2022 at approximately 1930 hrs from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, Odisha. The missile is a proven system and is capable of striking targets with a very high degree of precision.

Prithvi II:

- It is a short-range ballistic missile.
- It is a two-stage surface-to-surface missile.
- The missile can carry a 1,000 kg warhead to a distance of 350 km.
- It has been developed by the DRDO under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).

Military Exercises

6. EX SAMPRITI-X

» Prelims: Joint Military exercises of India

Context:

- A joint military training exercise between the Indian and Bangladesh military named Ex SAMPRITI-X is being conducted at Jashore Military Station in Bangladesh.

Details:

- Exercise SAMPRITI is conducted alternately by both countries.
- The Exercise aims to strengthen interoperability and cooperation between both the armies and to share best practices.
- The exercise will also provide an opportunity for strengthening trust between the armies of both the Nations and further contribute to peace and stability in the region.

Military Exercises

7. Ex Khaan Quest 2022

» Prelims: Ex Khaan Quest

Context

- An Indian Army contingent is participating in the exercise "Ex Khaan Quest 2022".

Details:

- This is a Multinational Peacekeeping exercise.
- This edition is being hosted by Mongolia.
- This exercise is seeing participation from military contingents of 16 countries including India.
- The exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability, building military to military relationships, and developing peace support operations and military readiness among participating nations.
- The military exercise will enhance the level of defence cooperation between the Indian Army and participating countries, especially with the Mongolian Armed Forces which will enhance bilateral relations between the two countries.

Military Exercises

8. RIMPAC-22

» Prelims: RIMPAC Exercise

Context

- India's INS Satpura entered Pearl Harbour in Hawaii Islands to participate in RIMPAC-22.

RIMPAC-22:

- The US Navy-led biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise-22 is aimed at enhancing interoperability and building trust among Navies of friendly foreign countries.
- 27 countries are participating in the current edition of the multi-dimensional exercise.
- The exercise comprises six weeks of intense operations and training.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

1. Payments for Ecosystem Services

» Mains: Payments for ecosystem services- Significance and impediments in its successful implementation

Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES):

- Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) occur when the beneficiaries or users of an ecosystem service make payments to the providers of that service. It works through the establishment of performance contracts.
- People who can help provide the desired ecosystem service are rewarded based on their actions, or the quantity and quality of the services themselves.
- Payments for ecosystem services (PES) policies compensate individuals or communities for undertaking actions that increase the provision of ecosystem services such as water purification, flood mitigation, or carbon sequestration.

Significance:

Environmental conservation:

- The PES system is one way to conserve and increase ecosystem services offered by the environment. This will contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

Dual benefit:

- PES could go a long way in incentivising local land stewards to manage threatened ecosystems. Hence it has the potential to achieve the dual goals of conservation and poverty alleviation in tandem.

Ensure adequate financing:

- The PES system helps ensure finance flows towards the conservation of natural resources. They incentivize biodiversity protection and their more sustainable use.

Outcome-based:

- Also, this system has the ability to tether investments more directly to outcomes and hence could be considered more effective.

Concerns:

- While tools like levies, fees, and fines for mobilizing finance towards conservation activities have gained governmental support and political will, there has been no such thing in the case of the PES system.
- The monetisation of environmental benefits and lack of additionality (how much environmental service would have been provided without conditional payments) remain two of the biggest issues around the PES system.
- The lack of a solid institutional mechanism to implement and monitor the PES system along with the lack of sustainable funds in this segment remain the main impediments to the successful implementation of PES in India.
    * Unlike in India, Latin America and African countries have witnessed successful implementation of the PES system.

Recommendations:

- Initiatives like the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) should be mainstreamed to help prioritize ecosystem restoration financing towards the more direct PES system.
- There is a need to have more evaluative studies to help understand the efficacy of the PES system.
- A global initiative such as the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative to mobilise private sector finance to benefit people and the environment would help ensure timely and adequate funds towards the PES system.

> ***Nut Graf***
>
> *The Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) provides a valuable avenue to mobilize adequate and timely finances towards environmental conservation. Additionally, it will help bring in more people's participation in conservational efforts.*

Environmental conservation - Initiatives in news

2. Lifestyle for the Environment- LiFE Movement

» Prelims: LiFE Movement

» Mains: Climate action by India at the domestic and global levels

Context:

- Prime Minister launched a global initiative 'Lifestyle for the Environment – LiFE Movement'.

Background:

- The idea of LiFE was introduced by the Prime Minister during the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow in 2021.

Details:

- The initiative aims to influence and persuade individuals, communities and organisations across the world to adopt an environment-conscious lifestyle.
- This movement will provide a platform welcoming multiple ideas across academia, universities, research institutes and industries with an extensive scope of community participation.
- The vision of LiFE is to live a lifestyle that is in tune with our planet and does not harm it. The idea promotes an environment-conscious lifestyle that focuses on 'mindful and deliberate utilisation' instead of 'mindless

and destructive consumption' Thus it promotes a more sustainable lifestyle with low carbon intensity.

- This could also be described as a global initiative of citizen action to promote pro-climate behaviours.

Steps being taken by India:

Domestically:

- India's forest cover is increasing and the population of animals such as lions, tigers, leopards, elephants and rhinos has been stabilizing.
- India has made notable progress in the mainstreaming of renewable energy in India's energy mix.
- The target of 10% ethanol blending in petrol has been achieved ahead of the November 2022 target.

At the regional and global level:

- Initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and One Sun One World One Grid provide an impetus to the adoption of renewable energy.
- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure initiative is a laudable step towards adaptation.

Environmental conservation - Initiatives

3. Ethanol blending

» Prelims: Ethanol blending targets

» Mains: Significance of ethanol blending

Context:

- India has achieved the target of 10 percent ethanol blending, 5 months ahead of schedule.

Background:

- The 'National Policy on Biofuels' had a target of 20% ethanol blending in petrol by year 2030. This target of 20% ethanol blending was advanced from 2030 to 2025-26.
- A "Roadmap for Ethanol Blending in India 2020-25" released in 2021 laid out a detailed pathway for achieving 20% ethanol blending. This mentioned an intermediate milestone of 10% blending to be achieved by November 2022.

Details:

- The Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies have attained an average of 10% ethanol blending in petrol across the country. This achievement indicates that the Ethanol Blending Programme is on track to achieve the target of 20% blending by 2025-26.

Significance of ethanol blending:

- Enhance India's energy security by reducing import dependency on fuel
- It will help save valuable foreign exchange. During the last eight years alone the shift to biofuels has helped India save forex of around Rs.41,500 crores.
- Reduce carbon emissions. In the last eight years alone, the shift to biofuels has helped reduce GHG emissions of around 27 lakh MT.
- Boost to the domestic agriculture sector.

Environmental conservation- Initiatives in news

4. Green Energy Open Access

» Prelims: Salient features of Green Energy Open Access rules

» Mains: India's transition to green energy and the emerging challenges

Context:

- The Government of India has issued rules on Green Energy Open Access to ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable green energy for all. These rules have been notified by the Ministry of Power.

Significance:

- The Green Energy Open Access rules will boost the ambitious renewable energy programmes and will facilitate India to step closer to its climate change targets set during COP 26.
- The rules are notified for promoting the generation, purchase and consumption of green energy including the energy from Waste-to-Energy plants.
- Under the Green Energy Open Access rules, every consumer becomes a stakeholder to contribute in achieving India's commitment of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel by 2030.

Salient features of the rules:

- Green Energy Open Access is allowed to any consumer and the limit of Open Access Transaction has been reduced from 1 MW to 100 KW for green energy. This will enable small consumers to purchase renewable power through open access.
- Charges levied on Open Access green energy consumers include:
  - Transmission charges
  - Cross-subsidy surcharge
  - Wheeling charges
  - Standby charges
- There is a scope for incentivising the consumers to go green by addressing the issues that obstructed the open access to green energy in India.
- The approval to grant open access will take 15 days or else it will be deemed to have been approved subject to fulfilment of technical requirements. The approval will be provided through a national portal to ensure transparency.
- The tariff for green energy will be determined by the appropriate commission.
- These rules will streamline the approval process for granting open access to green energy and improve the predictability of cash flows for renewable power producers.

- Banking of surplus green energy with distribution licensees is mandated.
- There shall be uniform renewable purchase obligations of all obligated entities in the area of distribution licensees.
- Green certificates will be given to the consumers.
- Cross subsidy surcharge and additional surcharge shall not be applicable if green energy is utilised for the production of green hydrogen and green ammonia.

Environmental conservation- Initiatives in news

5. India Forum for Nature-Based Solutions

» Prelims: India Forum for Nature-based Solutions

» Mains: Significance of India Forum for Nature-based Solutions

Context:

- The National Institute of Urban Affairs' (NIUA) Climate Centre for Cities (NIUA C-Cube), World Resources Institute India (WRI India) and their partners launched India's first national coalition platform for urban nature-based solutions (NbS) at the 11th World Urban Forum in Poland.

Background:

- Ecosystem-based services and Nature-Based Solutions are fast emerging as cost-effective and sustainable ways to address climate change-induced challenges such as heat, urban flooding, air and water pollution and storm surges.
- Apart from mitigating the impact of climate change, NbS also help in providing multiple ecosystem benefits along with addressing various societal challenges including creating resilience among the most vulnerable sections of urban communities that are most affected by climate change-induced disasters.

About the India Forum for Nature-based Solutions:

- It is India's first national coalition platform for urban NbS.
- It aims to create a collective of NbS entrepreneurs, government entities and like-minded organisations, to help scale urban nature-based solutions by:
  * Defining a shared language and communicating benefits that inform actions at the local level including scaling up of existing NbS interventions.
  * Driving investment and strengthening delivery mechanisms through multi-stakeholder coordination.
  * Mainstreaming urban ecosystem-based services and nature-based solutions in India through informing policy, plans and project interventions.
- 'India Forum for Nature-based Solutions' is led by the National Institute of Urban Affairs' Climate Centre for Cities (NIUA C-Cube) and anchored by World Resources Institute India (WRI India) under the Cities4Forests initiative.
- It is supported by Caterpillar Foundation, the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Govt. of the United Kingdom and Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI).

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

6. World's first fishing cat census done in Chilika

» Prelims: Fishing Cat Project, Fishing Cats

Context:

- Chilika Lake has 176 fishing cats, according to a census done by the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) in collaboration with the Fishing Cat Project (TFCP).

Fishing Cat Project (TFCP):

- The Fishing Cat Project (TFCP) is the world's longest-running research and conservation project on fishing cats and has been functional since 2010.
- It is currently functioning in two states of India – West Bengal and Odisha.
- In 2021, TFCP will aid in regularizing a population estimation protocol of fishing cats in Chilika – a Ramsar Site and Asia's largest brackish water lagoon.

Fishing Cat:

- The fishing cat (Prionailurus viverrinus) is a medium-sized wild cat of South and Southeast Asia.
- In India, fishing cats are mainly found in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, on the foothills of the Himalayas along the Ganga and Brahmaputra river valleys and in the Western Ghats.
- Conservation status
  * IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
  * CITES: Appendix II
  * Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I

Chilika Lake:

- Chilika Lake is Asia's largest brackish water lagoon.
- It is situated on the east coast of India in Odisha and is separated from the Bay of Bengal by a small strip of land.
- It spreads across the Khurda, Puri, and Ganjam districts of Odisha to the Daya river's mouth.

Conservation, Environmental pollution and degradation

7. Invasive weeds stifling Kaziranga

» Prelims: Invasive plant species

Context:

- Invasive plant species are impacting the health of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

Details:

- At present, there are 18 identified invasive plants in the tiger reserve which are impacting the indigenous grasses, shrubs and trees the herbivores sustain on.
- The list submitted to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) did not contain parthenium and lantana, which are considered the "usual culprits" of many protected areas in India.
    * Parthenium is believed to have come to India as contaminants in a consignment of wheat imported from the U.S. in the 1950s.
    * Lantana was brought by the British as ornamental plants from South America.
- The list includes Ipomoea (Ipomoea carnea) and Mimosa (Mimosa himalaica) but marked them as largely controlled.
- Some weeds have herbal properties, but their toxicity outweighs their utility.
    * Example: Wild boars love to gorge on the succulent rootlets of the Leea macrophylla or 'kukura thengia' that are fast clogging the patrolling paths and grasslands.
        » Cestrum diurnum or day-blooming jasmine of West Indies origin which are thriving on the Brahmaputra sandbars is a rich source of Vitamin D3.

Biodiversity

8. Glischropus Meghalayanus

» Prelims: Bamboo-dwelling bats and Glischropus meghalayanus

Context:

- Scientists have discovered a new species of bamboo-dwelling bat in Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya.

Details:

- The new species of bamboo-dwelling bat, found near the Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary, has been named Glischropus Meghalayanus.
    * Bamboo-dwelling bats are a particular kind of bats living in the internodes of bamboo with specialised morphological characters that help them to adapt to life inside a bamboo.
- This discovery marks the first report of a thick-thumbed bat not only from India but also from South Asia.
- Thick-thumbed bats of the genus Glischropus are composed of four recognised species from Southeast Asia.
- The newly discovered species is small in size and has a dark brown colour with a sulphur yellow belly.
- Meghalaya houses the highest bat diversity in India with 67 species (out of 131 discovered bat species in India), which is about 51% of total bat species in India because of its unique terrain, vegetation and climate conditions
    * The unique caves in Meghalaya have provided roosting opportunities for a large number of bats.

Biodiversity

9. Four new corals recorded from Indian waters

» Prelims: Azooxanthellate corals

Context:

- Scientists have discovered four species of corals for the first time in Indian waters.

Details:

- New species of Azooxanthellate corals were discovered in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) said that all four groups of corals are from the same family, Flabellidae.
- Truncatoflabellum crassum, T. incrustatum, T. aculeatum and T. irregulare under the family Flabellidae were earlier found in Japan, the Philippines and Australian waters, and only T. crassum was found in the Indo-West Pacific region.

Azooxanthellate corals:

- The azooxanthellate corals are a group of corals that do not contain zooxanthellae and derive nourishment from capturing different forms of planktons and not from the sun.
- Unlike the zooxanthellate corals, Azooxanthellate corals are not restricted to shallow waters.
    * They live in the vast expanse of the ocean depths where there is less competition for space.
- These corals are not limited by light or by temperature.
- These are a group of hard corals and the newly found species are not only solitary but have a highly compressed skeletal structure.

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

10. India's performance in EPI

» Prelims: Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

» Mains: Significance of EPI, India's performance in EPI 2022 and the objections raised by India on EPI 2022

Context:

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2022

Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

- The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is a global rating system that ranks nations based on their environmental health.
- EPI provides a data-driven evaluation of the global level of sustainability.
- EPI is a biennial index, launched by the World Economic Forum in 2002 as the Environmental Sustainability Index in partnership with the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Columbia University Center for International Earth Science Information Network.
- EPI indicators help to identify issues, define goals, follow trends, understand outcomes and identify effective policy methods.

Significance of EPI

- Good data and fact-based research may also help policymakers narrow their goals, improve relationships with important stakeholders and optimise the return on environmental spending.
- The EPI is an effective policy instrument for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and moving society toward a more sustainable future.
    * By emphasising these connections, the EPI contributes to the promotion of sustainable development in support of a more ecologically secure and equitable future.
- The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) statistics show that financial resources, excellent governance, human development and regulatory quality all play a role in boosting a country's sustainability.
- EPI helps decision-makers to identify all these factors that contribute to top-tier performance.

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2022 and India's performance

- The World Economic Forum released the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2022, on June 6, 2022 which ranks 180 countries in terms of climate change performance, environmental health and ecosystem vitality.
- Denmark tops the 2022 rankings, owing to outstanding performance across virtually all EPI-tracked problems
- India was ranked worst out of 180 countries assessed by US-based institutes for their environmental performance, which has been criticised by India.
    * India comes after Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Myanmar, the poorest performers.
- India was ranked low in a number of indicators such as ecosystem vitality, biodiversity, species protection index, wetland loss, air quality, PM 2.5, waste management climate policy and greenhouse gas emissions.
- India has also scored low on rule of law, control of corruption and government effectiveness, according to the report.

Objections Raised by India on EPI 2022

- The Government of India said that some indicators are extrapolated and based on surmises and unscientific methods
- Projected GHG Emissions Levels in 2050 the new indicator in the Climate Policy Objective is calculated using the average rate of change in emissions over the previous ten years rather than modelling that takes into account a longer time period, the level of renewable energy capacity and usage, extra carbon sinks, energy efficiency and so on in the individual nations.
- The equity principle is given relatively small weightage in the form of statistics such as GHG emission per capita and GHG emission intensity trend.
- The country's forests and wetlands are important carbon sinks that have been overlooked while calculating EPI 2022's predicted GHG emissions trajectory up to 2050.
- The weight of indicators in which the country performed well has been lowered, and the reasons for the change in weight assignment are not stated in the report.
- Indicators such as agricultural biodiversity, soil health, food loss and waste are not included, despite the fact that these are critical for developing nations with significant agrarian populations.
- In the current calculation, historical data on the lowest emission trajectory was ignored.

Nut graf:

India has been ranked the lowest in several parameters used in the Environmental Performance Index and despite India has criticised the methodology used inIndex, it is important that the country conduct an internal review to assess if it is adopting appropriate steps

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

11. Single Use Plastic ban

» Prelims: Single Use Plastic and Central Pollution Control Board

» Mains: Steps undertaken to phase out the use of SUPs

Context

- From July 1, "single-use plastic" will no longer be used, according to the Center and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has undertaken various measures to implement India's commitment to ban identified Single Use Plastic items.

Central Pollution Control Board

- CPCB is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- CPCB was set up in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and later entrusted with functions and responsibilities under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Ac.
- CPCB is a responsible for Air and Water Quality Monitoring Services and other pollution-related issues in India
- CPCB is led by its Chairman followed by the Member Secretary, and other members.

Single Use Plastics

- Single-use plastics, includes those plastic products that can be used only for one-time use before being discarded.
- Single-use plastics are products that are created mostly from chemicals derived from fossil fuels (petrochemicals) and are intended to be thrown away immediately after use
- Single-use plastic items include plastic bags (mostly less than 50 microns), water bottles, straws, coffee stirrers, cups, food and drug packaging plastic etc.

Cause of concern

- A report by Minderoo Foundation revealed that single-use plastics constituted about 33% of all plastic produced globally, with 98% manufactured from fossil fuels.
- Single-use plastic also accounts for the majority of plastic discarded which is burned, buried in landfills or discarded directly into the environment.
- Reports also suggest that single-use plastics would be responsible for nearly 5-10% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- India is ranked 94 among the top 100 countries of single-use plastic waste generation.
- Further, India's per capita single-use plastic waste generation is 4 kg with 11.8 million metric tonnes being produced domestically and about 2.9 MMT being imported annually.

Ban on the use of Single Use Plastics

- The Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change said that the manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of following single-use plastic, including polystyrene and expanded polystyrene, commodities shall be banned.
- The items banned by the CPCB include earbuds; balloon sticks; candy and ice-cream sticks; cups; glasses; spoons; sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packs; etc.
- As per the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, there is also a complete ban on packets using plastic material for storing, packing or selling gutka or tobacco products.
- The ban will be monitored by the CPCB from the Centre, and by the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) that will report to the Centre regularly.

Measures undertaken to discourage the use of SUPs.

- To curb the supply of these items, directions have been issued at national, state and local level to leading petrochemical industries to not supply plastic raw materials to the industries engaged in banned SUP production.
- Directions have been issued to the State PCB to revoke consent that has been issued under the Air/Water Act to industries engaged in banned SUP production.
- Customs authorities are mandated to restrict the import of banned SUP items.
- CPCB is promoting the use of alternatives to SUP
    * Example: CPCB has issued certificates to about 200 manufacturers of compostable plastic which can be used as an alternative to SUP.
    * Alternative materials to plastic that are reusable, environment-friendly and affordable like glass bottles, aluminium containers (for milk), cloth and jute bags
    * Alternatives made of natural material provide employment opportunities in the cottage industry
- With a view to support the MSMEs, CPCB is collaborating with various institutions to organise Workshops for MSMEs to help them shift to alternatives to SUP.

Nut graf:

The ban on the use of Single Use Plastics in India is a step in the right direction as many countries across the world have already prohibited the use of such items. However, the success of the same lies in the effective implementation which requires collective efforts.

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Weekly Updates

- **Economy this week**
  Round-up of business newspapers
- **Gist of economic and political weekly magazine**
- **International Relations This Week**
- **GK and current affairs quiz**

Monthly Updates

- **BYJU'S current affairs magazine**
  Compilation of current affairs
- **Gist of magazines**
  Extracts of articles and points from "YOJANA" and "KURUKSHETRA"

HEALTH ISSUES

Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

1. Community-oriented health services

» Mains: Role played by ASHAs; Challenges and recommendations for improving their effectiveness

Context:

- India's Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) volunteers have received the World Health Organization's Global Health Leaders Awards 2022.

Background:

- India launched the ASHA programme in 2005-06 for only rural areas as part of the National Rural Health Mission. Subsequently, this was extended to urban areas as well with the launch of the National Urban Health Mission in 2013.
- Currently, India has around one million ASHA volunteers.

Significant contributions made by the ASHA workers:

- ASHAs workers have made significant contributions towards enabling increased access to primary health-care services; i.e. maternal and child health, for both rural and urban populations, with a special focus on difficult-to-reach habitations and also the poor and the underserved in India.
- They have played an important role in increasing routine immunisation coverage; reducing maternal mortality; improving newborn survival and greater access to treatment for common illnesses.
- ASHAs have become pivotal to nearly every health initiative at the community level and are integral to demand-side interventions for health services in India.
- Working with the Anganwadi workers (AWW) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), they have been able to facilitate health and nutrition service delivery to the community.
- They have been active participants in platforms such as village health, sanitation and nutrition committees for coordination and service delivery.

Strength of the ASHA programme:

- The involvement of key village stakeholders in the selection of ASHAs has resulted in ensuring community ownership of the initiative. This has increased people's participation and also improved accountability on the part of the ASHAs.
- Given that the ASHAs come from the same village they work in, they enjoy better community connect and acceptance. This has helped increase their effectiveness.
- The performance-based incentives for ASHAs can ensure better accountability among the ASHAs.

Challenges/concerns:

- ASHA workers do not have a fixed salary as performance-based incentives remain the major component of their payment. Only a few Indian states offer a fixed amount of salary to ASHA workers.
- The payment for ASHA workers continues to remain low and is often delayed.
- This has resulted in dissatisfaction, regular agitations and protests by ASHAs in the many States of India.

Recommendations:

- The recent global recognition for India's ASHAs should be used as a chance to iron out the challenges in the programme and in this direction, the article makes the following recommendations.

Higher wages:

- There is a need to ensure higher remuneration for ASHAs. The performance-based incentives should be prioritized.

Capacity building and career progression:

- Institutional mechanisms should be built in to create ample opportunities for capacity-building and avenues for career progression for ASHAs. ASHAs should be provided opportunities to move to cadres such as ANM, public health nurses and community health officers. This would act as a major incentive for the ASHA workers.

Providing social security:

- ASHAs and their families should be considered for health insurance and other such social welfare schemes.

Regularization of the posts:

- Calls for regularisation of the temporary posts and making ASHAs permanent government employees should be given a thought.
- This will, apart from acting as an incentive to the ASHA workers, also help cover up for the extensive shortage of staff in the health workforce in the primary health-care system in India.

Nut Graf

SHA workers have a critical role in ensuring a people-centric primary healthcare service. In this respect, all necessary policy measures should be ensured to empower the ASHA workers further.

Issues relating to health

2. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

» Mains: Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

Context:

- The National Health Authority (NHA) and NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) jointly organized the NHA-NASSCOM Conclave 2022 on Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission – Revolutionizing Digital Health.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission:

- Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, will connect the digital health solutions of hospitals across the country with each other.
- Under this, every citizen will now get a digital health ID and their health record will be digitally protected.
- The National Health Authority (NHA) will be the implementing agency of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).
- Based on the foundations laid down in the form of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile (JAM) trinity and other digital initiatives of the government, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is creating a seamless online platform through the provision of a wide-range of data, information and infrastructure services, duly leveraging open, interoperable, standards-based digital systems while ensuring the security, confidentiality and privacy of health-related personal information.
- Under the ABDM, citizens will be able to create their ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) numbers, to which their digital health records can be linked.
- This will enable creation of longitudinal health records for individuals across various healthcare providers, and improve clinical decision making by healthcare providers.
- The mission will improve equitable access to quality healthcare by encouraging use of technologies such as telemedicine and enabling national portability of health services.-

SOCIAL ISSUES

Salient features of Indian Society; Social empowerment

1. The role of caste in economic transformation

» Mains: Role of caste as a structural impediment in economic transformation of India

Background:

- The protests against the Agnipath programme, agitations against farm laws last year, and agitation for reservation by agriculture castes in the recent past are all indicative of jobless economic growth in India.
- India has been in a phase of jobless growth for at least two decades now, coupled with rising poverty and discontent in rural areas.
- Notably, India has not been able to generate a pattern of growth that produces jobs and inclusive development in the way most East Asian countries have done. In this context, the article analyses the divergent outcomes in structural economic transformation in the global South, between China and Southeast Asia on one side and India on the other hand examining the role of caste as a structural factor that has impeded economic transformation in India.

Role of caste as a structural impediment in economic transformation:

- Caste impedes the economic transformation in India in the following ways.

Land ownership pattern:

- India has one of the highest land inequalities in the world today. The caste system has resulted in inequality in the land ownership pattern.
  - Land ownership pattern has been traditionally linked to the caste system with caste inequality in land ownership being a prominent trend in India. The unequal distribution of land was only further perpetuated by British colonial land revenue policies.
  - The land reforms in the post-independence phase largely excluded Dalits and lower castes. It mostly empowered intermediate castes at the expense of others in rural India.
  - The Green revolution of the 1960s only further strengthened the trend of unequal distribution of land because it was mostly the people with large land holdings that benefitted from the technological interventions that resulted in enhanced agricultural productivity. The castes that benefited from the Green Revolution tightened their social control over others in rural India.
- The disparity in land ownership patterns affects access to political, social, and economic capital too. This inequality affects the productive capacity of the population.

Elite bias in education:

- The elite bias in higher education and the historical neglect of mass education being attributable to the caste bias in education has resulted in educational inequality between the different castes.
- Human capital is an important factor for economic growth and development as an educated workforce enhances productivity while entrepreneurship ability is increased through education and training in skill sets. The lack of adequate education and appropriate skill among the workforce has become a drag on the Indian economy.
- The success of the Chinese and other East Asian countries is mainly attributable to their focus on basic education in the initial years and on higher education in the subsequent times. They have also prioritized skilling of the population. Through this, they have been able to build adequate and quality human capital.

Barrier to entrepreneurship:

- Caste through its rigid social control and networks facilitates economic mobility for some and erects barriers for others by mounting disadvantages on them. Castes that were already in control of trading and industrial spaces resisted the entry of others using the social networks built by them.
- This has acted as barriers to economic diversification among the predominantly agricultural sections of the society. Even those who had an economic surplus in farm sectors could not invest in non-farm modern sectors. Thus, social inequalities have mounted barriers for economic transition.
- This is in strong contrast to what was observed in Southeast Asia, where diversification into urban enterprises by agrarian capitalists was possible.

> ***Nut Graf:***
>
> *Apart from being a major factor for the existing inequalities in economic and social spheres, the caste system in India has acted as a major impediment to the economic transformation process in India. This aspect needs to be given due attention while planning for economic growth and development in India.*

Role of women and women's organization and associated issues

2. Gender inclusivity'

» Mains: Challenges to gender inclusivity in India and the way forward

Background:

- In 1952, when the Indian Republic held its first Parliamentary session, about 39 women leaders were present in the session challenging the traditional dominance of men in the polity.
    * Women's representation in the Indian parliament accounted for about 5.5% at a time when women constituted only 1.7% of the total members in the U.S. Congress and 1.1% of the Parliament of the U.K.
- The highly progressive representation of women in parliament is a testament to the contribution of thousands of women across professions, classes, castes, and religions in India's freedom movement.
- However, post the era of the pinnacle there is a changed discourse on the representation of women and inclusiveness.

Challenges with gender neutrality in Indian legislation:

- The number of women representatives is still considered very small and the Parliament as a workspace continues to be operated exclusively for men due to systemic issues.
- There is an absence of gender-neutral language in parliamentary communications and other discourses in India as it continues to refer to women in leadership positions as Chairmen and party men.
- The Rules of Procedure of the Rajya Sabha continue to refer to the Vice-President of India as the ex-officio Chairman.
    * Further, the Constitution uses male pronouns extensively which signifies a power structure biased towards men.
- In a compilation of ministerial replies to questions from the 17th Lok Sabha so far for 75 women Parliamentarians, it was reported that 84% of the answers that used salutations such as sir/madam referred to women Parliamentarians as 'sir'.
    * Whereas in the 15th Lok Sabha, when there was a woman Speaker only 27% of the answers made similar errors, thereby signifying the importance of representation of women.
- This issue also has its impact on law-making as in the last ten years, there have been very few gender-neutral Acts introduced.

Various initiatives in the past to ensure gender inclusivity:

- The movement for gender inclusivity has gained momentum in the past few years.
    * The Supreme Court in the National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India, 2014 upheld the rights of all individuals to self-identify their gender.
    * The Court clarified that gender identity did not refer to biological characteristics but rather referred to it as "an innate perception of one's gender".
    * Accordingly, people have started declaring their gender identity by specifying their personal pronouns (she/her, he/his, they/them, etc.)
- In 2014, under the leadership of the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha were made entirely gender-neutral.
- All the Lok Sabha Committee Heads are referred to as Chairpersons in all documents ever since.

Gender inclusivity in the rest of the world:

- Even those countries like Canada, Australia, and the US that legalised universal suffrage after India have undertaken various measures to ensure gender-inclusive legislation and communication.
- Canada's Department of Justice has provided guidelines for using gender-neutral language in all the documents of legislation.
- The Australian government has incorporated gender-neutrality in its drafting Style Manual.
- In 2007, the U.K.'s House of Commons announced that all laws would be made gender-neutral.

Recommendations for India:

- As seen in the past, amendments have played a key role in making documents gender-neutral. Therefore the Indian Parliament must introduce amendments that identify and rectify the past errors.
- India has to ensure transparency in the appointment and promotion process for women staff in Parliament and make sure that their professional growth is not affected by any issues such as harassment and domestic responsibilities.
- After bringing in corrections in the language, focus can be shifted towards deeper issues such as the aspirations and growth of the woman workforce.
- India can undertake a gender audit to understand the culture, environment, and policies in the workspace.

Nut Graf:

Despite having a woman Prime Minister, a President, and a higher percentage of women parliamentarians as compared to some of the mature democracies in the past, there are still various challenges to the gender inclusivity in India and these have to be immediately addressed to ensure equal treatment and appreciation of people irrespective of their gender.

Issues related to women

3. Istanbul convention

» Prelims: Istanbul convention

Context:

- Verkhovna Rada, which is the parliament of Ukraine passed a Bill that ratified the Istanbul Convention.

Istanbul Convention:

- The Council of Europe set up the Istanbul Convention, also called the "Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence", in April 2011.
- The treaty was opened for ratification in May 2011 and it entered into force in August 2014.
- The Istanbul Convention is the first legally-binding instrument that creates a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combat violence against women.
- This human rights treaty envisages to:
  * Prevent and prosecute all forms of violence against women
  * Promote gender equality
  * Ensure protection and rehabilitation of women who are victims of violence
- Turkey became the first country to ratify the Istanbul convention (However, in 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Convention).
- As of March 2019, it has been signed by 45 countries and the European Union.
- The Convention in its Article 3 defines "Gender" as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men".

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

4. Sex workers' rights

» Mains: Right to dignity in India.

Context:

- The bench of the Supreme Court issued directions in Budhadev Karmaskar v. State of West Bengal and Ors., a case pertaining to the brutal murder of a sex worker in 1999. The article discusses the recommendations in detail.

Background:

- In 1999, a sex worker had been brutally murdered for refusing to have sexual intercourse with the appellant.
- It led the courts to not only convict him for the act that he had committed but also to consider the bigger picture of the plight of sex workers, prostitutes, and the forced victims of the sex trade in society.
- The apex court passed the landmark judgment for the protection of sex workers' lives by giving a wide interpretation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and stabilizing the Right to Dignity of Life being accessible to them and their off-springs as well, which also led to the Supreme Court to contemplate on the regulation of prostitution under Indian jurisdiction.

Recommendations by the Supreme Court of India:

- The Panel of the apex court of India has provided 10 recommendations to ensure the rights of sex workers.
- The centre has expressed its objections regarding some of the recommendations and the centre has to provide a response before the next hearing of the court.
- The six recommendations that the Supreme Court has directed the government to implement are as follows:
  * Sensitization: It has been noticed that the attitude of the police to sex workers is often brutal and violent. It is as if they are a class whose rights are not recognized, hence, there is a need for sensitization.
  * Identities should not be revealed: The court said the media should take utmost care to not reveal the identities of sex workers, during arrest, raid, and rescue operations, whether as victims or accused, and not publish or telecast any photo that would result in disclosure of such identities.
  * Medical assistance: Immediate medical assistance should be provided to the sex workers who are victims of sexual assault.
  * Health measures as evidence: The bench also made it clear that the use of any health measures (contraceptives) should not be construed by the police as evidence of offense by sex workers.
  * Educate sex workers: The bench recommended that the central and the state governments should provide education to sex workers about their rights and the legality of sex work as well.
  * Release sex workers: The panel recommended that the adult workers who were kept in ITPA against their will should be released.

Objections by the Central Government:

- There are four recommendations on which the central government has expressed the reservations. They are discussed below:
- Criminal actions against sex workers:
  * Sex workers are entitled to equal protection from the law. Criminal law must apply equally in all cases, on the basis of 'age' and 'consent'. When it is clear that the sex worker is an adult and is participating with consent, the police must refrain from interfering or taking any criminal action.
  * It implies that being a sex worker voluntarily is not an offense until any assault is reported by the sex worker and the words 'abuse' and 'prostitution' also have different meanings.
  * Hence, it requires an appropriate definition of 'abuse of persons' and 'sexual exploitation' so that the enforcing agencies do not misuse the terms.

- Only running a brothel is unlawful:
  * It also stated that the sex workers should not be arrested, penalized, harassed, or victimized in raids on brothels since voluntary sex work is not illegal and only running the brothel is unlawful.
  * The brothel is used to imply a place that is used for the purposes of sexual exploitation or abuse for the gain of two or more sex workers.
  * There should be a policy or act to decide whether two or more sex workers living together for mutual gain are criminalized or not.
- Children of sex workers should not be separated from their mothers:
  * The Court also ordered that the child of a sex worker should not be separated from the mother merely on the ground that she is in the sex trade.
  * If a minor is found living in a brothel or with sex workers, it should not be presumed that the child was trafficked.
  * The Supreme Court has not mandated any separation of the child from the mother, it presumes trafficking.
  * The judge has recommended the rescue of a child from the brothel and he or she should be sent to any child care under the Juvenile Justice Act.
  * Hence, this recommendation should be considered to ensure child welfare.
- Representatives:
  * According to the fourth recommendation, the sex workers or their representatives should be involved in the decision-making or in the drafting of reforms.
  * This will ensure faster and more effective rehabilitation of the sex workers by active enforcement.

Way Forward:

- According to the ITPA Act, carrying out sex work outside the notified areas such as religious places, hospitals, educational institutions, etc. is not punishable. The ITPA Act also defines prostitution as the sexual exploitation or abuse of persons for commercial purposes. How this act is then allowed anywhere?
- Hence there should be a proper demarcation between prostitution and the work of sex workers.
- The government should ban prostitution and allow voluntary sex work with certain conditions.
- The directions by the Supreme Court should be used as an opportunity to improve the conditions of the sex workers and also bring clarity regarding laws and policies.

Nut Graf

The sex workers also have the right to live with dignity. Recently, the Supreme Court has given certain recommendations in the case of Budhadev Karmaskar v. State of West Bengal and Ors. These recommendations provide the opportunity to rehabilitate the sex workers more effectively.

Issues related to vulnerable sections of India

5. Child Marriage

» Mains: Critically analyze the Union's cabinet decision to increase the legal age of marriage in India.

Background:

- In India, child marriage has been a stumbling block for women since time immemorial.
- While earlier it was rampant across all parts of the country, government rules and acts managed to reduce it to an extent but it is still prevalent.
- In the 19th century, the marriageable age for women used to be 10 years and 15 years from 1949 onwards.
- However, in 1978, an amendment was passed under the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) to increase the marriageable age for girls to 18.
- In 2006, the Government of India enacted the Prevention of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) which replaced CMRA with a motto of the abolishment of child marriage.
- While it has been 44 years since the anti-child marriage act, the primitive practice continues in several parts of the country.
- Now, to bring women on equal footing with men, Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government has decided to raise the legal age of marriage for women to 21 from 18 years.
- Whether increasing the age of child marriage will solve the problem or not is analyzed with the help of the recently released data of the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), 2019-20.

Child Marriage and Health Outcomes:

- According to some empirical studies from South Asia, there is a correlation between early marriage and negative health and educational outcomes. Following are some adverse impacts of early marriage:
  * Early pregnancy and a lower likelihood of accessing ante-natal health care,
  * Higher risks of maternal morbidity and mortality,
  * Poor nutritional status of women, and
  * Poor nutritional and educational outcomes of children.
- These studies provide significant reasons to increase the age of marriage from 18 to 21 years.

Structural factors behind early marriage:

There are several structural factors behind early marriage. Some of them are discussed below:

Social norms:

- In some areas, social and cultural norms play a significant role in the early marriage of a girl child. Parents start preparation for the marriage once the girl has attained her menarche.

Poverty:

- In many cases, child marriage occurs due to poverty and the huge costs of dowry associated with late marriages.

Lack of education:

- In rural areas, a boy over a girl is preferred when it comes to education. Parents with low financial backgrounds promote the study of a boy and indulge the girl child in household chores.
- Hence, lack of education also plays an important role in early marriage.

State-wise data:

- The recently released NFHS-5 data shows the percentage of marriages in states in which the girls have not attained the legal age of marriage.
- The data shows that around 25% of the women aged between 18-29 got married before the legal age of 18. However, the percentage has declined as compared to the NFHS-4 survey which stood at 28%.
- The percentage is higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. In rural areas, it is 28% and in urban areas, it is 17%.
- West Bengal registered the highest percentage (42%) followed by Bihar and Tripura (40% each).
- States with the lowest percentages are Goa, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerela (between 6% to 7%).

Community, and Wealth Wise data:

- If we look at the community-wise data, it implies that Adivasis and Dalits contribute 39% of the total early marriages in India.
- The contribution of the advantaged social group is 17% and the remaining share is from other backward classes.
- The wealth-wise data shows that 58% of the total early marriages take place among the poorest wealth groups. Approximately 40% of them take place among the middle 50% and only 2% of them take place among the top 10% of wealth groups.

Role of Education:

- According to the data of NFHS-5, only 4% of the early marriage takes place among women who have completed 12 years of education.
- Hence, it indicates that most child marriages happen in the case of the girls who did not attend 12 years of schooling and those who are socially and economically backward.
- The age of marriage automatically increases from 17 (in the case of those who attended 5 years of schooling) to 22 years (in the case of those who have attended more than 12 years of schooling).
- Hence, education and an increase in the years of marriage go hand-in-hand.
- The data also shows that 27% of women who were illiterate and got married before the age of 18 are underweight as compared to those who were literate and got married at 21 years of age.
- Approximately, 64% of illiterate women suffer from anemia, and iron deficiencies, irrespective of their age at marriage.
- The gap between marriage and first pregnancy is higher in illiterate than literate women and the former gives more birth in comparison to the latter.
- The above-mentioned educational and health outcomes highlight the importance of education.

Way Forward:

- Increasing the legal age of women without increasing the educational status of women is not going to provide better health and nutritional outcomes. In fact, this will impact the poor and illiterate more adversely.
- The education of women is also important for their personal freedom, social and economic well-being, and overall development.
- An increase in the legal age of marriage will result in a positive outcome only when it is associated with increasing the education level and skills of women for employability.

Nut Graf

Despite increasing the legal age of marriage from 18 to 21 years, child marriage is still prevalent in India. Some structural factors such as social norms, poverty, and lack of education contribute to it. Among all the factors, education plays an important role. Hence, educating women will not only result in delaying marriages but also produce positive health and nutritional outcomes.

Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

6. Santhal tribe

» Prelims: Santhal Tribe

Context:

- As the National Democratic Alliance has nominated Droupadi Murmu for the Presidential election, the Santhal community has come under the spotlight.
- If elected, Droupadi Murmu will be the first tribal person to become the President.

Santhal Tribe:

- Santhal is the third-largest Scheduled Tribe community in the country after Gond and Bhil.
- According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), Bhubaneswar, the word Santhal is derived from two words:
    * Santha which means calm and peaceful
    * Ala which means man
- Earlier the Santhals led a nomadic life and eventually they settled down in the Chhotanagpur plateau.
- Santhals speak "Santhali" which has its own script called "Ol Chiki" which was invented by Pandit Raghunath Murmu.
    * Santhali in the Ol Chiki script has been included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution.
- The Santhal population is mostly distributed in Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- In Odisha, Santhals are seen in Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Balasore.
    * Mayurbhanj has one of the largest concentrations of the tribe.
    * The literacy rate of the Santhals is very high as compared to other tribes in Odisha.

EDUCATION

Issues relating to education

1. India needs free and quality higher education

» Prelims: National Education Policy

» Mains: Necessity to enhance the quality of education in India and the ways to achieve it.

Present Education scenario in India:

- There exists a plethora of challenges pertaining to quality education in India keeping into consideration the interventions by the government.
- As the demand for quality education and research in leading universities across the globe is at its peak, the tuition fees demanded by universities are beyond the reach of students in terms of affordability.
- The burden of tuition fees is becoming unbearable, thereby degrading the quality of education by transforming it into business.
- This is why the dropout rates, especially in higher education, are extremely high in India.
- The majority of the students from the economically disadvantaged section of the country are deprived of world-class education facilities and infrastructure.
- The availability of educational loans even with government collateral guarantees has not solved the problem to a great extent. It has added to the debt of education loans that have a tendency to cripple the economy of development and public welfare.

Intervening Steps:

- The National Education Policy 2020 which was proposed by the government has been perceived as a landmark step to refurbish the education system in a holistic and comprehensive manner.
- This Policy requires effectiveness in the implementation process and consensus between the centre and states.
- The National Educational Policy emphasised skill development and vocational training as the key ingredients to empower the basic foundation of the youth.
- Under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, several schools have been established with a vision to educate and skill millions of children at an early stage in an integrated and holistic manner.
- The implementation of vocational education has increased considerably in the last six years.
- Increase in the number of schools from 960 in the year 2014-15 to 11,710 schools across the country in 2021-22.
- At present, more than 1.5 million students are undertaking vocational training under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.
- There are 62 skill courses available at the secondary and the senior secondary level.
- CBSE has also been considering vocational training as an important component of holistic education.
- Courses offered by CBSE also provide wide choices for schools and students to choose from the relevant competency-based courses.
- The New Education Policy is centred on the purpose of transforming learning not only for cognitive development but also for building character accompanied by the essential skills that serve the demand of the 21st century.

Different models of education:

- The New York University's Grossman School of Medicine is noteworthy to be exemplified as it had announced the payment of tuition fees for all its students admitted to their MD programme (post-graduate degree in medicine), regardless of their financial needs. This is the first major American medical school to do so.
- This may be a model in the global education architecture which can be adopted and replicated in other countries.
- Most of the Nordic countries provide free higher education to their people and overseas students. However, in Denmark, tuition fees were introduced for international students from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area, in 2006.
- Currently, Finland, Norway, Iceland and Germany are the Nordic countries that do not charge tuition fees to international students.
- The Nordic model of education has attracted many students from across the world to acquire expertise in the field of their desire and avail employment opportunities.

The road ahead for India:

- The government must ensure that there is proper availability of funds to facilitate quality education to the students, especially to the socially and economically backward section of the society and ensure that the funds are reaching those who are in need.
- A strong sense of philanthropy and community involvement is required to enhance the quality of higher education in India.

- More awareness campaigns must be carried out to mitigate the dropout rates and prevent the discontinuation of higher education among girls.
- Challenges posed by prevailing inequalities in education in the light of social, economic and gender biases are to be addressed as they are the major impediments towards equitable education.
- Therefore, the lofty goals of skilling the youth and churning out the potential of the demographic dividend can only be possible by the active participation of all the stakeholders of the entire education system contributing to nation-building.
- It is expected that the government must act with generosity to make higher education in the country affordable and research tax-free.

> ***Nut Graf***
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> *In order to establish an inclusive system of education, a joint effort by the corporates, alumni and the government is required. This would create strong philanthropic support and tax breaks.*

Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

2. Scheme for Residential Education For Students in High schools in Targeted Areas

» Prelims: Facts about SHRESHTA Scheme

» Mains: provisions of the SHRESHTA Scheme

Context:

- Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment launched Scheme for Residential Education For Students in High schools in Targeted Areas (SHRESHTA).

Scheme for Residential Education For Students in High schools in Targeted Areas (SHRESHTA):

- SHRESTHA scheme has been formulated to provide quality education and opportunities for the poorest of the poor Scheduled Caste students based on the constitutional mandate.
- The scheme aims to provide access to quality education and a level playing field for all the students.
- The scheme will provide high-quality residential education free of cost from class 9th to 12th to the meritorious poor students from Scheduled Caste communities whose annual family income is up to Rs. 2.5 Lakh per annum.

Key provisions of SHRESHTA:

- Every year a specified number of meritorious students from the SC communities will be selected through a transparent mechanism of a National Entrance Test for SHRESHTA (NETS), conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).
- Students will be admitted to private residential schools that are affiliated with CBSE.
- Further, the students will be connected to the Post Matric Scholarship Scheme or a Higher Education Scheme of the Ministry to continue their further studies with adequate financial aid from the Government.
- Provisions in the scheme also facilitate a "Bridge Course" for a period of 3 months for the students joining the CBSE based schools from state schools, rural areas, or from regional language schools.
- The scholarships will be released in one instalment directly to the schools in the first quarter of every financial year and the scheme will be considered to be in Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) method.

Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

3. Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D)

» Prelims: Performance grading index for districts- Mandate and organizing ministry

» Mains- Initiatives to improve school education in India

Context:

- Ministry of Education releases the first-ever report on the Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) for the year 2018-19 and 2019-20.

About Performance Grading Index for Districts:

- The index assesses the performance of the school education system at the District level by creating an index for comprehensive analysis.
- The Department of School Education & Literacy had previously devised the Performance Grading Index (PGI) for States and released reports for the reference years 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- Based on the success of State PGI, 83-indicator-based PGI for District (PGI-D) has been designed to grade the performance of all districts in school education.
- Significance:
  - The PGI-D is expected to help the state education departments to identify gaps at the district level and improve their performance in a decentralized manner.
  - The indicator-wise PGI score shows the areas where a district needs to improve.
  - The PGI-D will reflect the relative performance of all the districts in a uniform scale which encourages them to perform better.

- PGI-D structure:
  * It comprises of total weightage of 600 points across 83 indicators, which are grouped under 6 categories:
    » Outcomes, Effective Classroom Transaction, Infrastructure Facilities & Student's Entitlements, School Safety & Child Protection, Digital Learning and Governance Process.
    » These categories are further divided into 12 domains, viz., Learning Outcomes and Quality (LO), Access Outcomes (AO), Teacher Availability and Professional Development Outcomes (TAPDO), Learning Management (LM), Learning Enrichment Activities (LEA), Infrastructure, Facilities, Student Entitlements (IF&SE), School Safety and Child Protection (SS&CP), Digital Learning (DL), Funds convergence and utilization (FCV), Enhancing CRCs Performance (CRCP), Attendance Monitoring Systems (AMS) and School Leadership Development (SLD).
  * PGI-D grades the districts into ten grades:
    » Daksh – highest achievable grade – for Districts scoring more than 90% of the total points in that category or overall.
    » Akanshi-3 – lowest grade – for scores up to10% of the total points.

GOVERNANCE

e-governance applications

1. National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment 2021 Report

» Prelims: About National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment

» Mains: Key findings of National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment 2021

Context:

- Union Minister Science and Technology will release the second edition of the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment 2021.

National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA):

- The Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions constituted the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) in 2019.
- It was constituted as part of its mandate to boost the e-government endeavours and drive digital government excellence.
- NeSDA is a biennial study (once in two years).
- NeSDA assesses States, Union Territories (UTs), and focuses on Central Ministries on the effectiveness of e-Governance service delivery.
- NeSDA helps the respective governments to improve their delivery of citizen centric services and shares best practices across the country for all States, UTs and Central Ministries to emulate.
- The second edition of the NeSDA study was started in January 2021.
- NeSDA 2021 covers services across seven sectors namely Finance, Labour & Employment, Education, Local Governance & Utility Services, Social Welfare, Environment and Tourism sectors.

Key takeaways from NeSDA 2021:

- NeSDA 2021 has highlighted clear progress in the e-Governance services across the country.
- Increase in e-Service Delivery
- Increase in the use of integrated or centralized Portals for delivery of e-Services
- Improvement across assessment parameter scores
- In NeSDA 2021, 1400 services across all States and UTs were assessed as compared to 872 in 2019.
- 74% of respondents of the county-wide citizen survey undertaken during the study, stated that they are satisfied with the e-Services provided by the States and UTs.
- The e-Services of Finance and Local Governance & Utility Services sectors were the most widely used
- The NeSDA 2021 findings reflect the journey of e-Services towards citizen centricity and benchmarking governance.

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

2. The debates around the Surrogacy Act

» Prelims: Surrogacy Act provisions

» Mains: Critical analysis of the Surrogacy Act

Context:

- Petitioners in the Delhi High Court questioned why marital status, age, or gender were the criteria for being allowed to commission or not commission surrogacy in India.

Surrogacy:

- 'Surrogacy' is defined as a practice where a woman undertakes to give birth to a child for another couple and agrees to hand over the child to them after birth.
- It allows 'altruistic surrogacy' — wherein only the medical expenses and insurance coverage are provided by the couple to the surrogate mother during pregnancy. No other monetary consideration will be permitted.

What is the Surrogacy Act?

- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill was introduced in Parliament in November 2016 and passed in the winter session of Parliament in 2021.
- The Act sought to regulate surrogacy, part of a rather flourishing infertility industry in the country.

Need for a Surrogacy Act in India:

- India has emerged as a hub for infertility treatment, attracting people from the world over with its state of the art technology and competitive prices to treat infertility.
- Due to prevailing socio-economic inequities, underprivileged women found an option to 'rent their wombs' and thereby make money to take care of their expenses — often to facilitate a wedding, enable children to get an education, or to provide for hospitalization or surgery for someone in the family.
- Once the information about the availability of such wombs got out, the demand also picked up.

- Unscrupulous middlemen inveigled themselves into the scene and exploitation of these women began.
- Several instances began to emerge where women, in often desperate straits, started lodging police complaints after they did not receive the promised sum.
    * For instance, in 2008 a Japanese couple began the process with a surrogate mother in Gujarat, but before the child was born they split with both of them refusing to take the child.
    * In 2012, an Australian couple commissioned a surrogate mother and arbitrarily chose one of the twins that were born.

Conditions with respect to surrogate mothers:

- Conditions for Intending Couples: Any couple that has 'proven infertility' are candidates. The 'intending couple' as the Act calls them, will be eligible if they have a 'certificate of essentiality' and a 'certificate of eligibility' issued by the appropriate authority. The former will be issued if the couple fulfils three conditions:
    * One, a certificate of infertility of one or both from a district medical board;
    * Two, an order of parentage and custody of the surrogate child passed by a Magistrate's court;
    * Thirdly, insurance cover for the surrogate mother.
- Eligibility Certificate: An eligibility certificate mandates that the couple fulfil the following conditions:
    * They should be Indian citizens who have been married for at least five years;
    * The female must be between 23 to 50 years and the male, 26 to 55 years;
    * They cannot have any surviving children (biological, adopted or surrogate).
- Surrogate Mother:
    * Only a close relative of the couple can be a surrogate mother, one who is able to provide a medical fitness certificate.
    * She should have been married, with a child of her own, and must be between 25 and 35 years, but can be a surrogate mother only once.

Controversies with the Act:

- Even at the Bill stage, while there was a general murmur of appreciation and some strident approval from infertility experts, there was some apprehension about the overly restrictive regulations.
- Representations from these groups emerged even as Health Minister J.P. Nadda introduced the Bill in the House.
- Others, primarily those involved in organ transplantation, pointed out how despite a similar, stringent law, organ commerce continues to thrive in the country.
- Brokers continue to operate, though with less temper and more covertly, sometimes with hospital authorities, to pull wool over the eyes of the appropriate authority and law enforcement officials.
- Clearly the issue will have to be handled with a stern visage, even as sensitivities of people are factored in.

Nut Graf

The Surrogacy Act is seen with apprehension due to the exclusionary criteria, which have already come to the forefront in the short period that the Act has been operational. There is a need to follow the path of appropriate litigation in order to resolve the grievances and ensure access for all categories of parents.

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

3. Food safety index

» Prelims: State Food Safety Index

Context:

- The State Food Safety Index (SFSI) was published by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Performance of states/UTs in State Food Safety Index (SFSI):

- Tamil Nadu topped the State Food Safety Index (SFSI) in 2022, followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- Among the smaller States, Goa stood first, followed by Manipur and Sikkim.
- Among the Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi and Chandigarh secured the first, second and third ranks.

About State Food Safety Index (SFSI):

- The State Food Safety Index (SFSI) measures the performance of States on the basis of five parameters prescribed by the Health Ministry.
- The rating is done by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).
- The index was started in 2018-19 with an aim to galvanise States/UTs to work towards ensuring safe and nutritious food to the citizens.

Government schemes/initiatives/programmes

4. Amrit Sarovar mission

» Prelims: Amrit sarovar mission

- The Amrit Sarovar mission is a water conservation mission launched by the Prime Minister aimed at developing and rejuvenating 75 water bodies in each district in all States as part of the celebrations of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.

* About 50,000 water bodies are expected to be rejuvenated during the nationwide programme.

- As the project would involve excavation of thousands of tonnes of earth in the form of soil or silt from ponds and tanks, the Union government has urged the Ministry of Railways and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to use the excavated soil or silt for their infrastructure projects.
- According to various reports, many railway projects have been paused due to the delay in getting the required quantity of burrow earth and the Amrit Sarovar mission will cater to the requirements of projects being implemented by the NHAI.

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

5. Agnipath scheme

» Prelims: About Agnipath scheme

» Mains: Critical evaluation of Agnipath Scheme

Context:

- The Union Cabinet today approved the AGNIPATH scheme for the recruitment of Indian youth to serve in the Armed Forces.

AGNIPATH scheme

- The AGNIPATH Scheme has been designed to enable a youthful profile of the Armed Forces. The scheme allows patriotic and motivated youth to serve in the Armed Forces for a period of four years.
- Youth selected under this scheme will be known as Agniveers
- Under the AGNIPATH scheme, the Agniveers will be enrolled in all three services – Army, Navy & Airforce. under respective Service Acts for a period of four years. They would form a distinct rank in the Armed Forces, different from any other existing ranks.
- Approximately 45,000-50,000 soldiers will be recruited every year under the new scheme, with the majority 75% being recruited only for 4 years.
- Upon the completion of four years of service, based on organisational requirements and policies promulgated by the Armed Forces from time to time, Agniveers will be offered an opportunity to apply for permanent enrolment in the Armed Forces

Eligibility criteria for Agniveers

- The age limit to apply for the scheme is between 17.5 to 21 years. The upper age limit has been relaxed from 21 years to 23 years for 2022-23. This will, however, be a one-time allowance.
- Medical and physical fitness criteria shall be met in accordance with existing rules, and recruitment would be done on an 'All India All Class' basis.

Significance of the scheme

- A transformative reform of the recruitment policy of the Armed Forces.
- A unique opportunity for the youth to serve the country and contribute to Nation Building.
- Armed Forces profile to be youthful and dynamic.
- The attractive financial package for the Agniveers.
  * After being picked, candidates would go through six months of training before being deployed for three and a half years. In the beginning, they would be paid Rs 30,000 which will go up to Rs 40,000 by the end of the 4th year.
  * At the end of the four years, each soldier would receive a lump sum payment of Rs 11.71 lakh, which will be tax-free.
  * They will also get Rs 48 lakh life insurance cover.
- Opportunity for Agniveers to train in the best institutions and enhance their skills & qualifications.
- Availability of well-disciplined and skilled youth with military ethos in civil society.
- Adequate re-employment opportunities for those returning to society and who could emerge as role models for the youth.
  * The government also asserted that it will expand job prospects and that soldiers will be able to find work in a variety of industries as a result of their abilities and experience gained during their 4-year service.
- The move will result in substantially lower permanent force levels for the country's roughly 13-lakh-strong armed forces. As a result, the defence pension expense will be significantly reduced, which has been a big issue for governments for many years.

Criticism on the scheme

- Soldiers in the Agnipath system may be hesitant to take chances since they know they will only be called up for a brief length of time. They may be fearful of danger or bodily harm while on duty.
- The 'All India All Class' intake mechanism and the option of four-year short-term contractual recruiting are causing concern among retired Army commanders. They believe that this new policy would be detrimental to Nepal-India ties because it would reduce their intake.
- New recruits have a four-year service time, which is far too short, and those who want to serve the country longer should be retained.
- The Army recruits around 50,000 soldiers per year, give or take 10%. According to this estimate, it will rise to 1-1.5 lakhs per year. As a result, the intake and recruiting models will be skewed.

Path ahead

- After 4 years, the Agniveers need to be infused into the civil society where they can contribute immensely towards the nation-building process.
- The infusion of disciplined, motivated and skilled 'Agniveers' back into society after military service, would be a great asset for the nation as it will be a "win-win proposition".
- The scheme will increase employment opportunities with new skills in different sectors.
- The scheme will give a better opportunity to the youth who choose to serve the nation.
- It will have a positive impact on the human resources management of the armed forces.

Nut graf:

The Agnipath scheme will have a significant positive impact on society, and contribute greatly to nation building. If the concerns associated with the scheme are addressed, Agniveers will play a crucial role in furthering economic growth and strengthening society.

HISTORY

The Freedom Struggle — its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.

1. Alluri Sitarama Raju

» Prelims: Alluri Sitarama Raju; Rampa Rebellion

Context:

- Union Minister of Culture, Shri G Kishan Reddy would be visiting Andhra Pradesh to review the preparations being made for commemoration of the yearlong 125th birth anniversary celebrations of the revolutionary freedom fighter, Sri Alluri Sitarama Raju.
- He was born on 4th July 1897.
- Along with the 125th birth anniversary, the Government of India will also be commemorating the 100th year of the popular Rampa freedom struggle

Details:

- Sri Alluri Sitarama Raju is an Indian revolutionary actively involved in the Indian Freedom Struggle. He is also referred to as "Manyam Veerudu" or the "Hero of Jungle".
- Alluri Sitaram Raju led the Rampa Rebellion in 1922 opposing the British Raj for enacting the 1882 Madras Forest Act, which heavily limited the tribal group's freedom of movement within their own woodlands.
- Between August 1922 and May 1924, for close to 2 years, Sitarama Raju led one of the most intense uprisings against the British.

Important personalities from the medieval period

2. Sant Kabir Das

» Prelims: Literary contributions of Sant Kabir Das

Context:

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind paid tributes to Sant Kabir and inaugurated Sant Kabir Academy and Research Centre and Swadesh Darshan Yojana at Kabir Chaura Dham, Maghar, Uttar Pradesh.

Sant Kabir Das:

- Sant Kabir Das was a 15th-century mystic poet, saint and social reformer and a proponent of the Bhakti Movement.
- He was born in the city of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh and spent the last moments of his life in the city of Maghar (Uttar Pradesh).
- Sant Kabir Das was a highly acclaimed poet of his time. Some of his famous writings include 'Bijak' and 'Kabir Granthawali'.
    * Bijak has a huge collection of poems.
- Kabir Das mainly wrote his poems in Hindi mixing with Avadhi, Braj, and Bhojpuri.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Disaster and Disaster Management

1. 5 mn Indians affected by disasters: UN

» Mains: Vulnerability of India to natural and man made disasters

- According to a United Nations report, about 50 lakh people were internally displaced in India due to climate change and disasters in 2021.
- The annual Global Trends Report by UNHCR pointed out that over 100 million people were forcefully displaced from their homes in 2021 globally on account of violence, human rights abuses, food insecurity, the climate crisis, war in Ukraine and other emergencies from Africa to Afghanistan.
- In the context of disasters in 2021, the largest displacements took place in China (6 million) followed by the Philippines (5.7 million) and India (4.9 million).

GEOGRAPHY

Important geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes

1. Tectonic Linkage of the Northeast Edge with Assam Earthquake

» Prelims: Earthquakes, 'P' & 'S' Waves

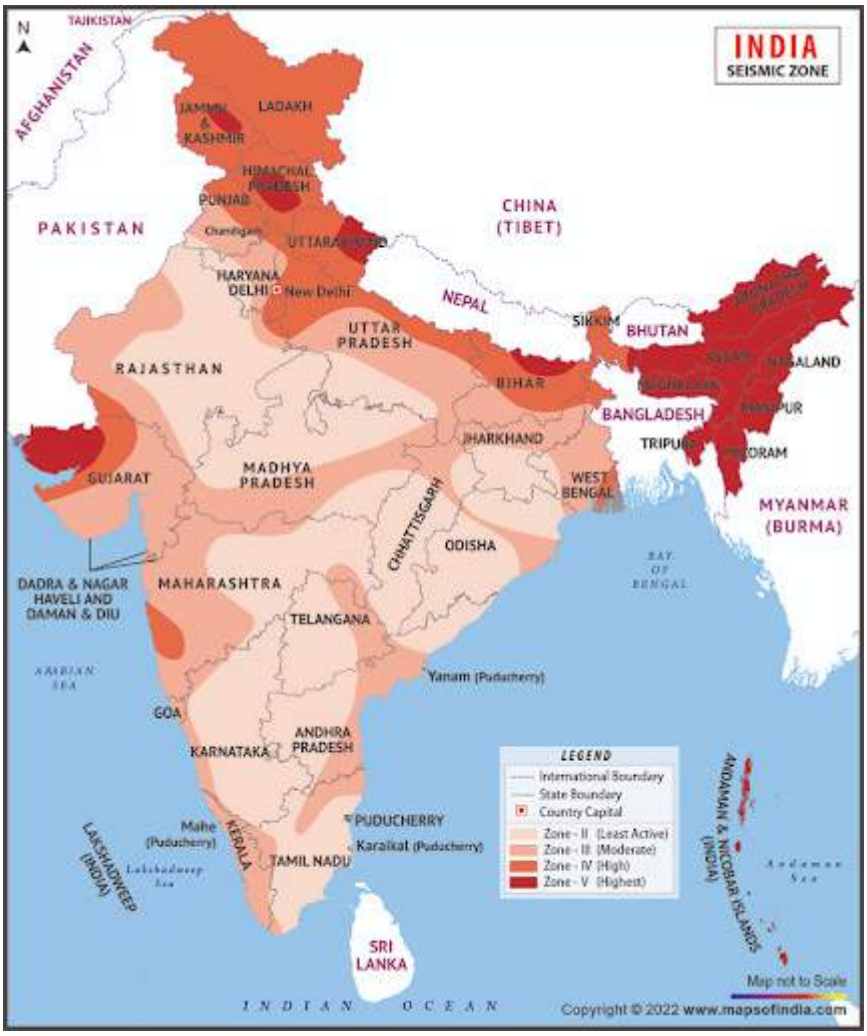
» Mains: Tectonic activities involved in making the Eastern Himalayan region earthquake-prone.

Context

- A study conducted by researchers from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology explained the complex tectonic activities involved in the Eastern Himalayas and the Indo-Burma Ranges (IBR). The study discussed the influence of tectonic activities on the great Assam earthquake.

Details:

- The study was based on the interactions between the northeastern fringe of the Indian plate in the Eastern Himalayas and the Indo-Burma Ranges (IBR).
- Such interactions have the potential to produce deeper earthquakes in the IBR and crustal earthquakes in the Eastern Himalayas.
- This is backed by the fact that the Eastern Himalayas are seismically very active up to a depth of 40 Km. The IBR region has seismic activity up to a depth of 200 Km.
- It was inferred that a seismic structure in Eastern Himalayas and the Indo-Burma Ranges (IBR) formed complex tectonics which produced the great Assam Earthquake of 1950 with a magnitude of 8.6.
- The Assam Earthquake was the largest intra-continental earthquake ever experienced which surrounded the area of the India-China border near Mishmi hill of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Eastern Himalayan Syntaxis (where the mountain ranges exhibit a southward bend) in Arunachal Pradesh and the bordering areas of Assam is acknowledged as one of the most seismically active regions of the world.
- The northeast corner of the Indian Plate belongs to seismic zone V of the national zoning map and does have the potential to generate earthquakes in the future.



Significance of the Study: Important findings

- The tectonic events in the northeastern fringe of the Indian plate have not been explained in a well-defined manner.
- This study documented important observations and inferences about the tectonic interactions between the Eastern Himalayas and the IBR resulting in earthquakes in the Northeast region.
- It is noted that after the 1950 earthquake in Assam, the region between upper Assam and the Mishmi block is not producing any larger earthquakes and is considered the seismic gap region.
- The study provided enough information regarding the moderate and microearthquakes in the Eastern Himalayas and the IBR.
- The research suggested that the subduction process and the indentation (strike-slip tectonics between two continental plates) process administer the seismicity of the areas around the Indo-Burma Ranges.
- The results of the study determined that the closely spaced Mishmi, Tidying and Lohit faults along the Lohit and Dibang River valleys of eastern Arunachal Pradesh are steeply dipping thrust sheets that place the large crustal shortening due to indentation process and clockwise rotation tectonics.
- The Walong fault, in the upper Lohit river valley, is accompanied by strike-slip motion with a thrust component that leads to clock-wise rotation of crustal material around the syntaxis.
- Due to complex syntaxial tectonics observed in Arunachal Pradesh, significant strain partitioning is anticipated.

The Tectonic Concepts:

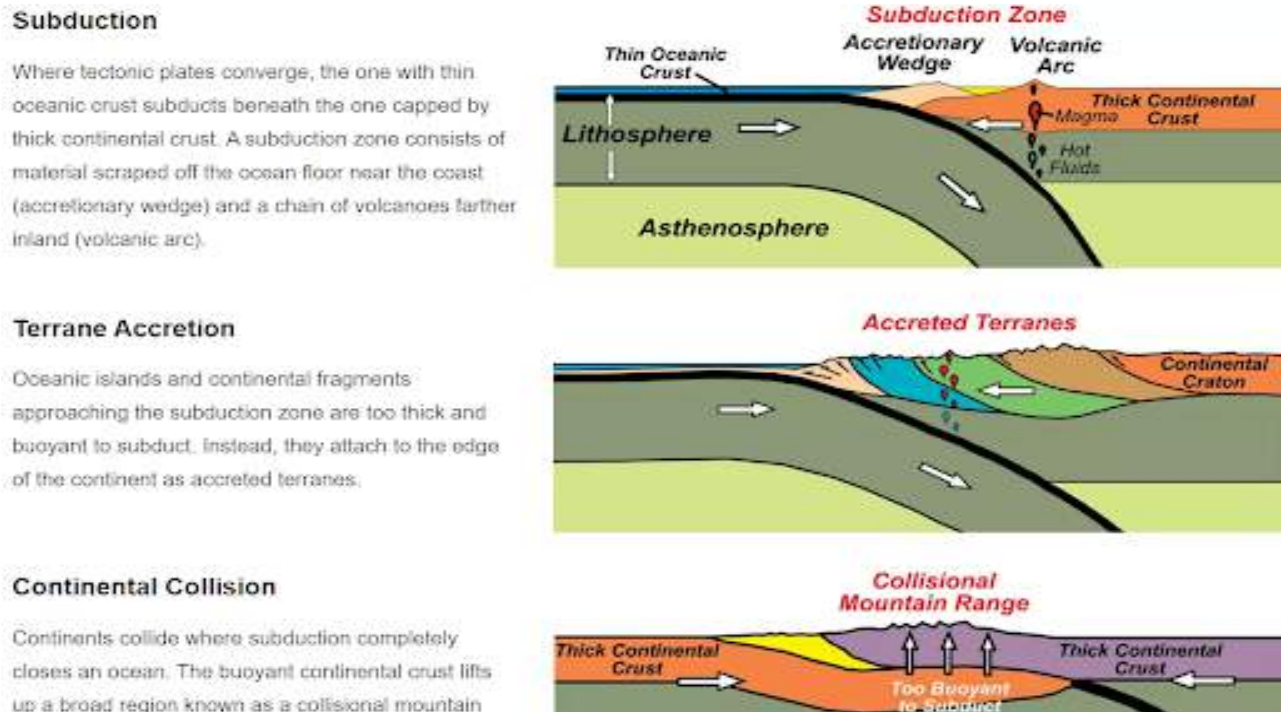


Image source: nps.gov

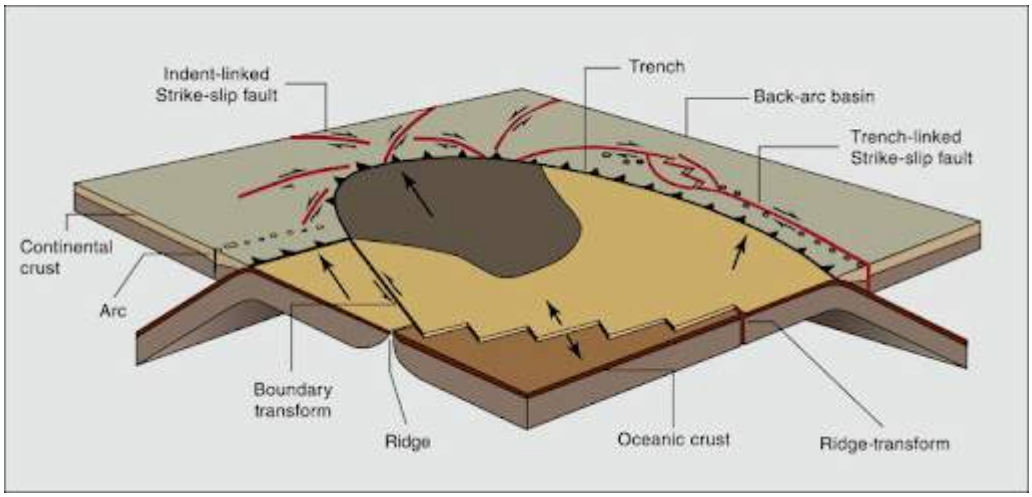


Image source: www.sciencedirect.com

Important geography terminology

2. Summer Solstice

- June 21 marks the longest day of the year for the Northern hemisphere and the shortest day in the Southern Hemisphere. It is called the summer solstice. This is the day when the sun is directly overhead the Tropic of Cancer. The Tropic of Cancer is the most northerly circle of latitude on earth at which the sun can be directly overhead.
- On this day, the north pole is tilted towards the sun, and the south pole is tilted away from the sun. Hence the days are longer in Northern Hemisphere and shorter in Southern Hemisphere.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Mechanisms and laws constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

1. Abortion rights

» Prelims: Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act.

» Mains: Critical evaluation of laws on abortions in India.

Context

- As the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade judgement of 1973, the laws governing abortion in India have come under the spotlight.

What is Roe v. Wade judgement, 1973?

- The Supreme Court's landmark judgment in Roe vs Wade case made abortion a constitutional right in the US
- It had extended the women in America the right to have an abortion before the foetus is viable outside the womb or before the 24-28 week mark.
- The U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade 1973 judgement which was considered a landmark judgement in extending women in America the right to have an abortion
- Abortion rights that have been available to women will now be determined by individual States. About 20 States have laws restricting or banning abortions.

Background of abortion laws in India

- Abortion was considered illegal in India except in cases where abortion was carried out to save the life of the woman under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 312.
    * Further, Section 313 of the IPC provided for the punishment for a person who causes a miscarriage without the consent of the pregnant woman, whether or not she is in the advanced stages of her pregnancy.
- In the 1960s, a high number of induced abortions were reported in the country and the union government then constituted a Shantilal Shah Committee in 1964 to look into the issue of abortions and find out if there was a need to formulate a law on abortions.
    * The Committee conducted a detailed study on the medical, legal, and socio-cultural aspects of abortion in the country
    * The Committee recommended the legalisation of abortion and comprehensive law on abortions to address the issues of unsafe abortions and maternal mortality rates.
- Based on the recommendations, the government formulated the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1971.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

- The act provided an exception to the provisions of the IPC Sections 312 and 313 and prescribed rules on how and when a medical abortion can be carried out.
- The Act allowed only for the medical termination of pregnancies.
- The MTP Act provided a legal framework zr making Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC) services available in India.
- Abortions were permitted;
    * If the prolongation of the pregnancy has a significant risk to a woman's health.
    * If there is an apprehension that an infant born out of the pregnancy would be vulnerable to adverse well-being and will be impaired.
    * where a pregnancy has occurred due to rape or failure of contraceptives.
- Termination of pregnancy was allowed for up to 20 weeks of gestation with a broad range of conditions where in:
    * The opinion of one registered doctor was required to access MTP for up to 12 weeks of pregnancy
    * The opinions of two doctors were required to access MTP for up to 20 weeks.

Evolution of the MTP Act

- New rules were introduced in 2003 which allowed the use of newly discovered abortion medicine pills, mifepristone and misoprostol to medically terminate a pregnancy up to seven weeks into it.
- Broader amendments to the original Act were introduced through the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act that came into force in September 2021.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021

- This amendment act increased the upper limit of the gestation period to which a woman can seek a medical abortion to 24 weeks from 20 weeks permitted in the original Act of 1971. However, this increased upper limit can be exercised in specific cases only wherein:
    * A woman is either a survivor of sexual assault or rape or incest
    * A woman is a minor
    * If the woman's marital status has changed during the ongoing pregnancy (either widowed or divorcee)
    * If a woman has major physical disabilities or is mentally ill

    * On the grounds of foetal malformation incompatible with life or if the child is born, it would be seriously handicapped
    * If the woman is in a humanitarian setting or disaster or emergency situation as declared by the government.
- Further, the opinion of only one doctor will be required up to 20 weeks of pregnancy and two doctors for the termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks.
- Pregnancy can be terminated beyond the 24-week gestational age, only on the grounds of foetal abnormalities and if a four-member Medical Board set up in each State under the Act, provides permission to do so.

Judicial interventions in cases of abortions

- It is noted that several women approach the Supreme Court and High Courts when medical boards disapprove their application to access MTP beyond the gestational upper limit (now 24 weeks), seeking permission to abort a pregnancy, mostly in cases of sexual assault or if there is a foetal abnormality.
- A report by an advocate for the Pratiya Campaign pointed out that in the 15 months leading up to August 2020, High Courts across the country were hearing over 243 petitions of women seeking permission for abortions.
- In the landmark Puttaswamy judgement, the Supreme Court said that the decision by a pregnant person on whether "to continue a pregnancy or not" is part of such a person's right to privacy and, hence it is also a part of right to life and personal liberty guaranteed under the Article 21 of the Constitution.
- In the Suchita Srivastava v Chandigarh Administration case a woman was impregnated because of rape and the high court ordered that her pregnancy be terminated but she wanted the child.
    * The SC allowed her to exercise her choice and held that "a woman's right to privacy, dignity and bodily integrity should be respected".
- In 2015, the Gujarat high court rejected a petition seeking to terminate the pregnancy of a 14-year-old rape victim who was in the 24th week of her pregnancy as the original MTP Act of 1971 permitted abortion only until 20 weeks.
    * However, the Supreme Court squashed the HC order and allowed the individual to opt for an MTP when she was nearly 26 weeks pregnant.
- In February 2022, the Uttarakhand High Court ordered a rape survivor to terminate a 28-week foetus.
- Further, the Calcutta High Court in February 2022, allowed a 37-year-old woman, who was 34 weeks into her pregnancy, to avail an MTP as the foetus was diagnosed with an incurable spinal condition.
    * This judgment allowed abortion for the furthest gestational in India so far.

Criticisms against the abortion law

- Shortage of doctors
    * The MTP Act mandates that abortion has to be performed only by doctors with specialisation in gynaecology or obstetrics.
    * A study by Lancet in 2018 found that over 1.56 crore abortions occurred annually in India as of 2015.
    * However, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's 2019-20 report on Rural Health Statistics shows a 70% shortage of obstetricians or gynaecologists in rural India.
- Challenges of unsafe abortions
    * Critics feel that since the law does not permit abortion at will, it forces women to access illegal abortions under unsafe and unhygienic conditions.
    * Reports show that about eight lakh unsafe and illicit abortions are performed in India annually and many of them have resulted in maternal mortality.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. 'Abnormal' dinosaur egg found in India

- A group of researchers from the University of Delhi has discovered a distinct set of fossilised dinosaur eggs, with one egg nesting within the other.
  - * The eggs-within-eggs are said to be a rare phenomenon and are known to occur only in birds and never known in reptiles.
  - * This discovery establishes new relations between reptilian and avian evolution.
- The findings point out the "egg-in-egg" phenomenon in a Titanosaurus dinosaur egg found at Bagh in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district.
- Dinosaurs of the Sauropod family were among the largest land animals that ever lived
  - * Fossils of these animals have been found in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Meghalaya.
  - * The Upper Cretaceous Lameta Formation of Central India is famous for its dinosaur fossils (both skeletal and egg remains)

2. Use of ICT in school education in India receives UNESCO's recognition

» Prelims: UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize

Context:

- The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) under a comprehensive initiative called PM eVIDYA by the Department of School education during the COVID-19 pandemic has won UNESCO's recognition.

King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize:

- The King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Education is a UNESCO prize that recognises innovative use of ICT in enhancing learning, teaching and overall education performance.
- This prize was established in 2005
- The prize is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goal 4 on Education.
- The prize is funded by the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain
- The prize is conferred to two laureates every year.
- Each winner receives US$ 25,000, a medal and a diploma during a ceremony at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris

PM eVIDYA Initiative :

- The PM eVIDYA was started as a part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan by the Ministry of Education in 2020.
- PM eVIDYA is also called a one Nation digital platform.
- The initiative combines all efforts related to digital/ online education to enable multi-mode access for imparting education by using technology to reduce learning losses.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the index of eight core industries?

   1. It is released by the Office of Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

   2. Among the eight sectors, the highest weightage is given to the electricity sector while the least weightage is given to fertilizer industry.

   3. Under the electricity vertical, renewable energy is not included.

   Options:

   A. 1, 2 and 3

   B. 1 and 2 only

   C. 2 and 3 only

   D. 1 only

2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to textile exports from India?

   1. There has been a substantial dip in the Textile and Apparel export from India in the current year owing to reduction in demand in the global market and competition from emerging players like Bangladesh and Vietnam in the export market.

   2. United Arab Emirates is the top export destination for Textile and Apparel exports from India.

   Options:

   A. 1 only

   B. 2 only

   C. Both 1 and 2

   D. Neither 1 nor 2

3. Which of the following pairs of Indigenous livestock breeds and their main associated state is incorrectly matched?

   1. Amritmahal – Punjab

   2. Ongole – Rajasthan

   3. Malenadu Gidda- Tamil Nadu

   4. Surti – Bihar

   5. Beetal- West Bengal

   Options:

   A. 1, 2 and 5

   B. 1, 3 and 4

   C. 2, 4 and 5

   D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

4. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect with respect to GST compensation?

   1. As per the provisions of the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017, the states are assured of compensation for loss of any revenue arising on account of the implementation of GST for a period of 15 years.

   2. The States' protected revenue is projected at a compounded growth rate of 10%

   3. The compensation fund is funded by the Consolidated Fund of India.

   Options:

   A. 1 and 2 only

   B. 2 and 3 only

   C. 1 and 3 only

   D. 1, 2 and 3

5. Which article of the Constitution of India safeguards one's right to marry the person of one's choice?

   A. Article 19

   B. Article 21

   C. Article 25

   D. Article 29

6. Consider the following statements with regards to international trains: (Level – Easy)

   1. The Samjhauta Express ran between India & Pakistan.

   2. The Thar Express provided direct connectivity between India & Pakistan on the basis of the Simla agreement.

   3. The Maitree Express connects India with Nepal.

   Choose the correct code.

   A. 1 & 2 only

   B. 2 & 3 only

   C. 1 & 3 only

   D. All of the above

7. The 'Har Ghar Dastak' campaign is associated with which of the following? (Level – Medium)

   A. The census exercise

   B. Mission Indradhanush

   C. Polio vaccination

   D. Covid-19 vaccination

8. Consider the following statements with regards to IMF's Extended Fund Facility: (Level – Difficult)

   1. The EFF was established to provide assistance to countries experiencing serious payment imbalances because of structural impediments or slow growth and an inherently weak balance-of-payments position.

   2. Amounts drawn under an EFF are to be repaid over 4½–10 years in 12 equal semi-annual instalments.

   3. Extended arrangements are typically approved for periods of three years but may be approved for periods as long as 4 years to implement deep and sustained structural reforms.

   Choose the correct code:

   A. 1 & 2 only
   B. 2 & 3 only
   C. 1 & 3 only
   D. All of the above

9. Consider the following statements with regards to the National Green Tribunal: (Level – Easy)

   1. The members of the NGT shall hold office for a term of five years and are not eligible for reappointment.

   2. The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure 1908, but shall be guided by principles of 'natural justice'.

   3. NGT is mandated to make disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of the filing of the same.

   Choose the correct statements:

   A. 1 & 2 only
   B. 2 & 3 only
   C. 1 & 3 only
   D. All of the above

10. Consider the following statements: (Level - Difficult) [UPSC 2021]

    1. In India, there is no law restricting the candidates from contesting in one Lok Sabha election from three constituencies.

    2. In the 1991 Lok Sabha Election, Shri Devi Lal contested from three Lok Sabha constituencies.

    3. As per the existing rules, if a candidate contests in one Lok Sabha election from many constituencies, his/her party should bear the cost of by-elections to the constituencies vacated by him/her in the event of him/her winning in all the constituencies.

    Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

    A. 1 only
    B. 2 only
    C. 1 and 3
    D. 2 and 3

11. With reference to the Death Penalty in India, which of the following statements is/are correct? (Level – Medium)

    1. The Judicial Magistrate of first class and Court of Sessions can award the death sentence, but the high court needs to confirm it for the death sentence to be valid.

    2. The Law Commission of India in its 262nd report recommended the retention of the death penalty in India.

    Options:

    A. 1 only
    B. 2 only
    C. Both
    D. None

12. Consider the following statements with respect to the Liquid mirror telescope: (Level – Medium)

    1. It is the country's first and largest liquid-mirror telescope, as well as the largest in Asia.

    2. It is located at an altitude of 2450 metres at the Devasthal Observatory campus of Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES).

    3. The telescope was designed and built at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore.

    Which of the above statements is/are correct?

    A. 1 and 2 only
    B. 2 and 3 only
    C. 1 and 3 only
    D. 1, 2 and 3

13. Consider the following statements: (Level – Difficult)

    1. Sufiana Gharana of Kashmir is the only Hindustani Classical Music Gharana from Jammu and Kashmir.

    2. Santoor is an Indian stringed musical instrument.

    Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

    A. 1 only
    B. 2 only
    C. Both
    D. None

14. Which of the given statements with respect to Guru Arjan Dev is/are correct? (Level -Difficult)

    1. He laid the foundation of Harmandir Sahib Gurudwara, popularly known as the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

    2. He was the founder of major cities of Punjab such as Tarn Taran Sahib and Kartarpur.

    3. He was executed by Aurangzeb on charges of helping prince Khusrau with money and prayer.

    Options:

    A. 1 only

    B. 3 only

    C. 1 and 2 only

    D. 1, 2 and 3

15. Water can dissolve more substances than any other liquid because (Level – Difficult) [PYQ 2021]

    A. It is dipolar in nature

    B. It is a good conductor of heat

    C. It has high value of specific heat

    D. It is an oxide of hydrogen

16. Consider the following statements with regards to Arya Samaj: (Level – Easy)

    1. The Samaj opposes worship of murtis (images), animal sacrifice, shraddha (rituals on behalf of ancestors), basing caste upon birth rather than upon merit, untouchability, child marriage, pilgrimages, priestly craft, and temple offerings.

    2. It has worked to further female education and intercaste marriage, has built missions, orphanages, and homes for widows, has established a network of schools and colleges, and has undertaken famine relief and medical work.

    3. It upholds the infallibility of the Vedas and the doctrines of karma.

    Choose the correct code.

    A. 1 & 2 only

    B. 2 & 3 only

    C. 1 & 3 only

    D. All of the above

17. The recently discovered plant – ribbon weed, or Posidonia australis, in Australia's Shark Bay, is unique because it is (Level – Difficult)

    A. The world's oldest plant

    B. The world's largest plant

    C. The world's widest plant

    D. The world's most poisonous plant

18. Consider the following statements with regards to the Employee's Provident Fund Organization: (Level – Easy)

    1. It is a government organization that manages provident funds and pension accounts for the workforce engaged in the organized sector in India.

    2. It implements the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

    3. It is administered by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

    Choose the correct code:

    A. 1 & 2 only

    B. 2 & 3 only

    C. 1 & 3 only

    D. All of the above

19. Consider the following statements with regards to the National Achievement Survey (NAS): (Level – Medium)

    1. The NAS is an exercise carried out annually to monitor the health of the country's school education system.

    2. It assesses the students at the end of classes 3, 5, 8 and 10.

    3. The first edition was carried out in 2001.

    Choose the correct statements:

    A. 1 & 2 only

    B. 2 & 3 only

    C. 1 & 3 only

    D. All of the above

20. Which one of the following is a reason why astronomical distances are measured in Light-years? (Level – Medium) [UPSC 2021]

    A. Distances among stellar bodies do not change

    B. Gravity of stellar bodies does not change

    C. Light always travels in straight line

    D. Speed of light is always same

21. Consider the following statements:

    1. Uranus has the lowest density of all the planets in our solar system.

    2. Neptune is considered as a lopsided planet

    3. Uranus and Neptune are often called planetary twins.

    Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 3 only
D. 1, 2 and 3

22. Munneru River is a tributary of which amongst the following Rivers?
A. Cauvery
B. Godavari
C. Krishna
D. Narmada

23. Which of the following statements about International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is/ are correct?
1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations
2. ITU is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
3. The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) is an initiative of ITU

Options:
A. 1 and 3 only
B. 2 only
C. 1, 2 and 3
D. None

24. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) Movement':
1. The idea of LiFE was introduced by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow
2. The idea promotes an environment conscious lifestyle that focuses on 'mindful and deliberate utilisation' instead of 'mindless and destructive consumption'.

Which of the statements give above is/are correct?
A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both
D. None

25. Consider the following statements:
1. It was during the reign of Iltutmish that Chengiz Khan reached the Indus in pursuit of the fugitive Khwarezm prince.
2. It was during the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughluq that Taimur occupied Multan and crossed the Indus.
3. It was during the reign of Deva Raya II of Vijayanagara Empire that Vasco da Gama reached the coast of Kerala.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
A. 1 only
B. 1 and 2 only
C. 3 only
D. 2 and 3 only

26. Consider the following pairs with respect to joint exercises held by India:

Joint Exercise	Associated country
1. SAMPRITI	Bangladesh
2. Vajra Prahar	U.S.
3. Hand in Hand	France
4. Dharma Guardian	Thailand

How many pairs given above are correctly matched?
A. Only one pair
B. Only two pairs
C. Only three pairs
D. All four pairs

27. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the Fishing Cat?
1. It is a mostly diurnal animal.
2. Initially found across the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia, owing to habitat destruction, and hunting the animal is currently endemic to only India.
3. It is the state animal of West Bengal.

Options:
A. 1 and 3 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 2 only
D. 3 only

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28. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Sant Kabir?

1. Bijak is one of the main literary works of Sant Kabir.

2. The verses of Sant Kabir are found in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

29. Which of the following pairs of space missions/ programmes and their descriptions are correctly matched?

1. Tiangong: China's space station

2. Chang'e: China's lunar mission

3. Artemis: NASA's lunar mission

4. Gaia: European Space agency's galactic surveyor

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

C. 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

30. Why are dewdrops not formed on a cloudy night? [UPSC 2019]

A. Clouds absorb the radiation released from the Earth's surface.

B. Clouds reflect back the Earth's radiation.

C. The Earth's surface would have low temperatures on cloudy nights.

D. Clouds deflect the blowing wind to ground level.

31. Which of the following best describes the newly launched Jan Samarth Portal? [Level: Medium]

A. It is meant to collect feedback from the people on the implementation of Union government schemes.

B. It is a portal to drive people's participation in the policy formulation process.

C. It is a one stop digital portal linking government credit schemes.

D. It is a portal to lodge complaints against errant public officials.

32. Which of the following statements is/are correct? [Level: Medium]

1. UAE figures among India's top three global trade partners.

2. Saudi Arabia is India's topmost oil supplier globally.

3. Among the Gulf countries, UAE houses the highest number of Overseas Indians.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

33. Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to India's international cooperation with respect to disability? [Level: Difficult]

1. India has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities but is yet to ratify it.

2. India is a Party to the Incheon Strategy "To make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific Region.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

34. Consider the following pairs of valleys and their associated states. [Level: Difficult]

	Valley	**State**
1.	Yankti kuti	Uttarakhand
2.	Yumthang	Nagaland
3.	Dzukou	Mizoram
4.	Chamba	Himachal Pradesh

How many pairs given above are correctly matched?

A. Only one pair

B. Only two pairs

C. Only three pairs

D. All four pairs

35. The money multiplier in an economy increases with which one of the following. [Level: Medium, UPSC 2019]

A. Increase in the cash reserve ratio

B. Increase in the banking habit of the population

C. Increase in the statutory liquidity ratio

D. Increase in the population of the country

36. Consider the following pairs of tribal revolts and the associated personalities. (Level: Difficult)

Tribal revolts	Personality
1. Khasi uprising of 1830s	Tirot Sing
2. Kol uprising of 1830s	Budhu Bhagat
3. Santhal rebellion of 1850s	Sidhu Murmu

Which of the above pairs are correctly matched?

A. Only one pair

B. Only two pairs

C. All three pairs

D. None of the pairs

37. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to surface-level Ozone pollutant? (Level: Medium)

1. Ozone is a secondary pollutant.

2. As per the new air quality standards notified by the environment ministry, for ozone, the limits are 100 and 180 µg/m3 respectively as 1-hour and 8-hour mean values.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

38. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to e-waste in India? (Level: Easy)

1. India is the world's largest e-waste generator in the last two years.

2. More than 90% of the e-waste generated in India is collected and scientifically disposed of.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

39. Which of the following are the powers enjoyed by the Rajya Sabha? (Level: Medium)

1. The authority to move a subject from the State List to the Union List for a set amount of time.

2. Recommending the creation of additional All-India Services.

3. When the Lok Sabha is dissolved, Rajya Sabha can declare an emergency under Article 352 for a limited time.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

40. In the context of digital technologies for entertainment, consider the following statements: (Level: Medium) [UPSC 2019]

1. In Augmented Reality (AR), a simulated environment is created, and the physical the world is completely shut out.

2. In Virtual Reality (VR), images generated from a computer are projected onto real life objects or surroundings.

3. AR allows individuals to be present in the world and improves the experience using the camera of a smart-phone or PC.

4. VR closes the world, and transposes an individual, providing complete immersion experience.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 3 and 4

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 4 only

41. Consider the following statements with respect to Chief Secretary: (Level: Medium)

1. The office of the Chief Secretary had its origin in the Central Government during the British rule and was created in 1799 by Lord Wellesley.

2. He/she is chosen by the Governor from among the senior IAS officers of the State Cadre.

3. The powers and functions of the Chief Secretary are mentioned in the 'Rules of Business' framed by the Central government.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 2 only

D. 1 and 3 only

42. Which of the following statements with respect to Sugarcane is/are correct? (Level: Medium)

1. Sugarcane originated in New Guinea.

2. Sugar recovery is highest when the weather is dry with low humidity; bright sunshine hours, cooler nights with wide diurnal variations and very little rainfall during the ripening period.

3. Maharashtra is the largest cultivator of sugarcane in India.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

43. With respect to Anti-Defection law, which of the following statements is/are correct? (Level: Difficult)

1. The Presiding Officer can take up a defection case suo moto.

2. According to Anti Defection law a petition seeking disqualification has to be decided by the Presiding Officer within three months

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both

D. None

44. Which amongst the following crops are the Kharif crops? (Level: Medium)

1. Gravitational For

2. Rice

2. Cotton

3. Bajra

4. Mustard

5. Tur

Options:

A. 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

B. 1, 3 and 5 only

C. 2, 4 and 5 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

45. With reference to recent developments regarding 'Recombinant Vector Vaccines', consider the following statements: (Level: Medium) (UPSC 2021)

1. Genetic engineering is applied in the development of these vaccines.

2. Bacteria and viruses are used as vectors.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

46. Which of the following statements is/are correct? (Level: Medium)

1. An election to fill the vacancy caused by the expiration of the term of office of the outgoing President is required to be completed within six months of the end of the term, until which the outgoing President will serve as the caretaker President.

2. Political parties can issue a whip to their members to vote in favour of a candidate like that observed in the elections to the Rajya Sabha.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

47. Consider the following statements with respect to the World Investment Report: (Level: Medium)

1. It is published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

2. As per this report, India is the third-largest Foreign Direct Investment receiving country after China and the U.S.

Which of the above statements are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

48. Consider the following pairs of seas and bordering countries. (Level: Medium)

	Sea	Bordering country
1.	Aegean Sea	Turkey
2.	Sea of Okhotsk	Japan

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3. Adriatic Sea Italy
4. Tasman Sea Australia

Which of the following pairs is correctly matched?

A. 1, 2 and 4 only
B. 2, 3 and 4 only
C. 1, 2, 3 and 4
D. 1 and 3 only

49. Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to bond yields? (Level: Difficult)

1. There is an inverse relationship between bond price and bond yield.
2. Higher interest rates in the economy will lead to a lowering in the bond

Options:

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

50. Which of the following are the reasons for the occurrence of multi-drug resistance in microbial pathogens in India? (Level: Medium)

1. Genetic predisposition of some people
2. Taking incorrect doses of antibiotics to cure diseases
3. Using antibiotics in livestock farming
4. Multiple chronic diseases in some people

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

A. 1 and 2
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1, 3 and 4
D. 2, 3 and 4

51. Consider the following statements:

1. Jaduguda is the first mine in the country to produce uranium ore in a commercial scale
2. Uranium deposits are not found in Northeastern states
3. Uranium has applications in the counterweights of aircraft control surfaces and radiation shielding.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 3 only
D. 1 and 3 only

52. Which one amongst the following statements best describes Amyloidosis?

A. A rare genetic disorder characterized by the abnormal accumulation of iron in the brain and various internal organs.
B. A rare disease that occurs when an abnormal protein builds up in organs and interferes with the normal function
C. A rare inflammatory disorder that can affect the entire body
D. A disorder characterized by loss of hair.

53. Fernandina Giant Tortoise is listed as in the IUCN Red List.

A. Critically endangered (CR)
B. Endangered (EN)
C. Vulnerable (VU)
D. Near threatened (NT)

54. Which of the following statements about Sant Tukaram is/are correct?

1. He was a contemporary of Maratha ruler Shivaji Maharaj
2. He pointed out the evil of wrongdoings of society, social system and Maharajs by his kirtans and abhangs.

Options:

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both
D. None

55. Among the following crops, which one is the most important anthropogenic source of both methane and nitrous oxide?

A. Cotton
B. Rice
C. Sugarcane
D. Wheat

56. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Alluri Sitaram Raju?

1. He led the Rampa Rebellion opposing the enactment of the 1882 Madras Forest Act.
2. He was inspired by the Non-Cooperation Movement and persuaded people to wear Khadi

Options:

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

57. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Zonal Councils in India?

1. The Zonal councils are Constitutional bodies provided for under article 263 of the Indian Constitution.

2. The Union Home Minister is the common chairman of the zonal councils.

3. The union territory of Lakshadweep is a member of the western zonal council

Option:

A. 1 and 2 only
B. 2 only
C. 3 only
D. 2 and 3 only

58. The term 'Peace clause' is used frequently with respect to which of the following international organizations?

A. International Monetary Fund
B. United Nations Security Council
C. World Trade Organization
D. International Atomic Energy Agency

59. Which of the following countries is not part of the Five Eyes alliance?

A. Canada
B. Japan
C. Australia
D. New Zealand

60. 'RNA interference (RNAi) technology has gained popularity in the last few years. Why?

1. It is used in developing gene silencing therapies.

2. It can be used in developing therapies for the treatment of cancer.

3. It can be used to develop hormone replacement therapies.

4. It can be used to produce crop plants that are resistant to viral pathogens.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

A. 1, 2 and 4
B. 2 and 3
C. 1 and 3
D. 1 and 4 only

61. Which of the following statements are correct? (Level - Moderate)

1. Dinosaurs of the Sauropod family were widespread millions of years ago in the territory that is now India.

2. Fossils of these animals have been found in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Meghalaya.

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

62. Which of the following statements are incorrect? (Level - Easy)

1. Groundwater contamination can occur only due to industrial pollutants.

2. Contaminants found in groundwater cover a broad range of physical, inorganic chemical, organic chemical, bacteriological, and radioactive parameters.

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

63. Which of the following statements best defines the G-33? (Level - Easy)

A. It is an informal grouping at the UN to push for UN reforms.

B. It is group of small island countries for collectively representing their interests at the Climate Change convention

C. It is a coalition of developing countries for coordination during WTO negotiations, specifically in regard to agriculture.

D. It is list of countries that have boycotted Persistent Organic Pollutants or POP's.

64. Which of the following initiatives under Purvottar Kalyan have helped in transforming the political & economic landscape of North-East India, in recent years? (Level - Moderate)

1. AFSPA areas reduced & peace accords with insurgent groups.

2. New air routes for improving connectivity under UDAN.

3. Construction of Bogibeel bridge.

4. Setting up of higher education institutions.

5. Establishment of Bamboo technology parks.

Choose the correct code.

A. 1, 3 and 4 only

B. 2, 4 and 5 only

C. 2 and 5 only

D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

65. Consider the following statements: (Level - Difficult)

1. Genetic changes can be introduced in the cells that produce eggs or sperms of a prospective parent.

2. A person's genome can be edited before birth at the early embryonic stage.

3. Human induced pluripotent stem cells can be injected into the embryo of a pig.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 2 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

66. Consider the following statements with regards to Broken Rice: (Level – Easy)

1. If rice kernels are not sound, it is called broken rice.

2. China is now the top buyer of Indian broken rice, which was earlier exported mostly to African countries.

3. Broken Rice can be converted to make wine and noodles.

Choose the correct code.

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

67. Consider the following statements with regards to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG): (Level – Medium)

1. NJDG provides information relating to judicial proceedings/decisions of all computerized district and subordinate courts of the country.

2. Case data is available on NJDG for both civil and criminal cases with the ability to perform drill-down analysis based on the age of the case as well as the State and district.

3. NJDG doesn't mention any reasons for pendency of cases.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

68. Who amongst the following is the Chancellor of the Vishva Bharati University? (Level – Easy)

A. President of India

B. Vice President of India

C. Prime Minister of India

D. Union Education Minister

69. Lake Sawa in Iraq has been seen in the news recently because (Level – Medium)

A. Huge deposits of natural gas are found underneath it

B. Huge deposits of crude oil are found underneath it

C. The lake has dried up

D. It is the country's first private lake

70. Consider the following statements: (Level – Difficult)

1. Web 1.0 was the first generation of the Internet, made of static web pages that only allowed for passive engagement.

2. Web2.0, the Internet of today, has created a social web, allowing users to communicate with servers and other users.

3. Web3.0, the next generation, envisages a digital world built on blockchain technology and driven by artificial intelligence, where people will interact without needing an intermediary.

4. Web 5.0 is aimed at "building an extra decentralized web that puts you in control of your data and identity".

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 4 only

B. 2, 3 & 4 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

71. Under the Indian Constitution, concentration of wealth violates (Level – Easy)

A. The Right to Equality

B. The Directive Principles of State Policy

C. The Right to Freedom

D. The Concept of Welfare

72. Consider the following statements with regards to the census exercise in India:

1. Census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.

2. The decennial Census is conducted by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. The information collected during the population Census is so confidential that it is not even accessible to the courts of law.

Choose the correct code.

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

73. Consider the following statements with regards to the National Pension System:

1. NPS is being implemented and regulated by PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority).

2. OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin) card holders and Hindu Undivided Family (HUFs) are not eligible for opening of NPS accounts.

3. The withdrawals are permitted from the Tier 1 account as per the needs of the subscriber as and when claimed.

Choose the incorrect code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

74. The New Development Bank (NDB), formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, a development bank established by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) has four more members apart from the five founding states. Name them. (Level – Difficult)

A. Bangladesh, Egypt, UAE, Uruguay

B. Italy, Israel, Japan, Germany

C. Bangladesh, Lebanon, Singapore, Australia

D. Nigeria, Mexico, Fiji, Kuwait

75. Consider the following statements with regards to the Periodic Labor Force Survey: (Level – Easy)

1. It was launched by the National Statistical Office.

2. The National Statistical Office (NSO) uses "rotational panel sampling design" in urban areas to assess the labor force participation rate (LFPR).

3. The Labor Force Participation Rate is the percentage of persons in the labor force (that is, working or seeking work or available for work) in the population.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

76. With reference to Madanapalle of Andhra Pradesh, which one of the following statements is correct?

A. Pingali Venkayya designed the tricolour Indian National Flag here.

B. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah led the Quit India Movement of Andhra region from here.

C. Rabindranath Tagore translated the National Anthem from Bengali to English here.

D. Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott set up headquarters of Theosophical Society first here.

77. Consider the following statements: (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. The right to property ceased to be a fundamental right with the 42nd Constitution Amendment in 1978.

2. The Doctrine of Adverse Possession refers to the power of the government to take private property and convert it into public use.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both

D. None

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78. Which of the following statements is/are correct? (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. Population control and family planning are under the State list.

2. The responsibility of conducting the decennial Census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, the current fertility rate is slightly lower than the replacement level of fertility of 2.1 children per woman.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

79. With respect to the Press Council of India (PCI), which of the following statements is/are correct? (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. It only has the power to enforce standards on print media and has no powers to enforce standards on electronic media.

2. PCI is responsible for enquiring about the complaints it receives and can also penalize anyone for violation of the guidelines.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both

D. None

80. Which of the following missiles is/are developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme? (Difficulty Level: Easy)

1. Agni
2. Akash
3. Trishul
4. Prithvi

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 4 only

C. 1, 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

81. Which one of the following best describes the term "greenwashing"? (Difficulty Level: Medium) [UPSC 2022]

A. Conveying a false impression that a company's products are eco-friendly and environmentally sound.

B. Non-inclusion of ecological/environmental costs in the Annual Financial Statements of a country.

C. Ignoring the disastrous ecological consequences while undertaking infrastructure development.

D. Making mandatory provisions for environmental costs in a government project/ programme.

82. In which of the following international groupings, India is a member, but no ASEAN nation is a member?

1. Mekong Ganga Cooperation
2. Shanghai Cooperation Organization
3. SAARC
4. BIMSTEC

Choose the correct code.

A. Any 1 of the above

B. Any 2 of the above

C. Any 3 of the above

D. All of the above

83. Consider the following statements:

1. UNESCO has designated Champaner-Pavagadh Archeological Park as a World Heritage Site, calling it the "only complete and unchanged Islamic pre-Mughal city".

2. Kalika Mata Temple lies within the Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park.

3. The temple complex also houses a dargah.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

84. Which of the following nations is/are not members of the I2U2 group?

1. Indonesia
2. United Kingdom
3. Israel
4. UAE
5. India
6. Ukraine

Choose the correct code:

A. 1, 5 & 6 only
B. 1, 2 & 6 only
C. 3, 4 & 5 only
D. 2, 3 & 4 only

85. The infamous 'Black Death' pandemic was caused by which of the following microorganisms?

A. Bacteria
B. Virus
C. Fungi
D. Protozoa

86. 'R2 Code of Practices' constitutes a tool available for promoting the adoption of [UPSC 2021]

A. Environmentally responsible practices in electronics recycling industry

B. Ecological management of 'Wetlands of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention

C. Sustainable practices in the cultivation of agricultural crops in degraded lands

D. 'Environmental Impact Assessment' in the exploitation of natural resources

87. Consider the following rainfall distribution categories by the Indian Meteorological Department on an all-India scale:

1. Normal or near normal, when the percentage departure of actual rainfall is +/-10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA (Long Period Average).

2. Below normal, when departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA.

3. Above normal, when actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA

4. Deficient, when departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA.

5. Excess, when the departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1, 2 & 4 only
B. 3, 4 & 5 only
C. 1 & 5 only
D. All of the above

88. Consider the following statements about the properties of Urea:

1. It is acidic in nature.
2. It consists of Nitrogen and Oxygen only.
3. It can be used to supplement cattle feed.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 3 only
C. 1 only
D. All of the above

89. Consider the following statements with regards to the FATF:

1. Grey List has countries that are considered safe havens for supporting terror funding and money laundering.

2. Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put on the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities.

3. FAFT was established in 1989 during the G20 Summit in Paris.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

90. 'Amal' puppet, in the news recently, is on a mission to raise awareness about which of the following issues?

A. Syrian refugee crisis
B. Removing IP barriers from Covid vaccines
C. Child labour in Western Africa
D. Increasing Monkeypox cases

91. Which one of the following is likely to be the most inflationary in its effects? [UPSC 2021]

A. Repayment of public debt

B. Borrowing from the public to finance a budget deficit

C. Borrowing from the banks to finance a budget deficit

D. Creation of new money to finance a budget deficit

92. Consider the following statements with respect to Department-related Standing Committees (DRSCs)? (Level - Medium)

1. Currently there are 24 DRSCs with all of them coming under the jurisdiction of the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

2. The term of office of these committees does not exceed five years or the term of the LokSabha whichever is lower.

3. The DRSCs consider the Demands for Grants, annual reports and examine bills pertaining to the related Ministries/Departments and their recommendations are binding.

Which of the above statements is correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 3 only

D. None of the statements

93. Which of the following pairs of festival and the associated state are correctly matched? (Level – Difficult)

Festival State

1. Sarhul Jharkhand

2. Wanchuwa Assam

3. Nongkrem Meghalaya

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

94. Which of the following statement/s are correct with respect to Goa's conquest and Liberation? (Level – Difficult)

1. Goa became a Portuguese colony in 1510, when Afonso de Albuquerque captured the city from the sultan of Bijapur.

2. Tristao de Braganca Cunha was a prominent Indian nationalist and anti-colonial activist from Goa.

3. India annexed the then Portuguese Indian territories of Goa, Daman and Diu through an armed action codenamed Operation Vijay in 1960.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

95. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the Provisions of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017? (Level – Medium)

1. The Maternity leave should not be availed before eight weeks from the date of expected delivery.

2. The act has a provision which requires establishments with 50 or more employees to provide creche facilities.

3. There is a mandatory work from home provision which the employee can avail after the end of the maternity leave period for up to six months.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 2 only

96. Consider the following statements: (Level - Easy)

1. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) exchange rates are calculated by comparing the prices of the same basket of goods and services in different countries.

2. In terms of PPP dollars, India is the sixth largest economy in the world.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

97. The King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize is associated with which of the following? (Difficulty Level: Medium)

A. Education

B. Science and Technology

C. Health

D. Journalism

98. Consider the following transboundary rivers. (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. Feni
2. Teesta
3. Umngot
4. Kushiyara

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. Only one

B. Only two

C. Only three

D. All the above four

99. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect? (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. India suffers a net deficit in terms of international agricultural commodity trade.

2. Among the agricultural commodity imports by India, edible vegetable oils account for the

3. highest imports in terms of value in the last few years.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. None

100. Consider the following statements with respect to Legislative Councils in India. (Difficulty Level: Medium)

1. The creation of Legislative Council requires both the legislative assembly of the concerned state and the Parliament to pass the resolution by a special majority.

2. The Legislative Council of a state shall not have more than half of the total strength of the State Assembly, and not less than 40 members.

3. Currently, seven states have a Legislative Council in India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

C. 3 only

D. None of the above

101. What is Cas9 protein that is often mentioned in news? (Difficulty Level: Medium) (PYQ-2019)

A. A molecular scissors used in targeted gene editing

B. A biosensor used in the accurate detection of pathogens in patients

C. A gene that makes plants pest-resistant

D. A herbicidal substance synthesized in genetically modified crops

102. Consider the following statements with regards to single use plastics: (Level – Difficult)

1. According to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, there is a complete ban on sachets using plastic material for storing, packing or selling gutkha, tobacco and pan masala in India.

2. Bangladesh became the first country to ban thin plastic bags in 2002.

3. Vanuatu and Seychelles have banned plastic straws outright.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

103. 'Black Swan event' is a phrase used in the news quite frequently. What does it mean? (Level – Easy)

A. A natural disaster induced by human activities

B. A rare, unpredictable event with a significant impact on society or the world

C. A law which is considered against the interests of wildlife

D. An initiative specially designed to preserve marine life in the country

104. Consider the following statements with regards to the transgender athletes: (Level – Difficult)

1. In October 2021, World Rugby became the first international sports governing body to institute a ban on transgender women competing in global competitions like the Olympics and the women's Rugby World Cup.

2. Recently, the International Swimming Federation (FINA) voted against allowing transgender athletes to participate in female competitions – the exception being that the transgender athlete must have completed their transition before the age of 12.

3. In the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, Canadian athlete Quinn became the first-ever transgender athlete to win a medal at the Olympics.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

105. Which of the following nations had adopted Bitcoin as an official currency? (Level – Easy)

A. Ecuador
B. St. Kitts and Nevis
C. El Salvador
D. San Marino

106. Consider the following statements in respect of the Laureus World Sports Award which was instituted in the year 2000: (Level – Difficult)

1. American golfer Tiger Woods was the first winner of this award.

2. The award was received mostly by 'Formula One' players so far.

3. Roger Federer received this award maximum number of times compared to others.

Which of the above statements are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only
D. 1, 2 and 3

107. Consider the following statements: (Level – Easy)

1. On December 21 every year, the Northern hemisphere has summer solstice, when the night is the longest.

2. On the Equator, the sun is directly overhead on two days – spring equinox in March and the autumn equinox in September.

3. As one moves farther and farther away from the Equator, the difference between the lengths of day and night grows.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

108. Consider the following statements with regards to inflation and interest rates: (Level – Easy)

1. A 5% inflation implies the general price level in April this year was 5% more than what it was in March this year.

2. The technical definition of a recession requires an economy to contract for two consecutive quarters; a quarter is a period of three months.

3. Raising interest rates by the RBI is an attempt to achieve lower inflation.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

109. Consider the following statements with regards to Typhoid: (Level – Medium)

1. There are no available vaccines to prevent Typhoid.

2. Typhoid fever is caused by the highly contagious Salmonella Typhi virus.

3. According to the WHO, a large proportion of severe typhoid fever cases occur in children aged below two years.

Choose the incorrect code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

110. Which of the following is the motto of the Indian Navy? (Level – Medium)

A. We Protect
B. May the Lord of Water be auspicious unto us
C. Service Before Self
D. Not self but country

111. Which one of the following is used in preparing a natural mosquito repellent? (Level – Easy)

A. Congress grass
B. Elephant grass
C. Lemon grass
D. Nut grass

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112. Consider the following statements: (Level – Easy)

1. Article 174(2)(b) of the Constitution gives powers to the Governor to dissolve the Assembly on the aid and advice of the cabinet.

2. However, the Governor can apply his mind when the advice comes from a Chief Minister whose majority could be in doubt.

3. When the House is in session, it is the Speaker who can call for a floor test. But when the Assembly is not in session, the Governor's residuary powers under Article 163 allow him to call for a floor test.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

113. Consider the following statements with regards to taxation on Virtual Digital Assets in India: (Level – Difficult)

1. A tax deducted at source (TDS) of 1 per cent will be levied on the transfer of VDAs effective July 1 if the value of transactions exceeds Rs 10,000 in a year.

2. The CBDT has defined four primary VDAs — bitcoin, ether, USD Tether and USD Coin — for the purpose of tax deduction on lesser-known cryptocurrencies.

3. If two different cryptocurrencies, say bitcoin and ether, are being exchanged, both the persons would be considered buyers as well as sellers. Therefore, none of them would pay any tax with respect to the transfer of the cryptocurrency.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

114. Consider the following statements with regards to Corals: (Level – Medium)

1. The azooxanthellate corals are a group of corals that do not contain zooxanthellae and derive nourishment not from the sun but from capturing different forms of planktons.

2. The Gulf of Kutch in the northwest has some of the most northerly reefs in the world.

3. Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands are rich with flourishing island corals.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

115. Consider the following statements with regards to Keibul Lamjao National Park: (Level – Easy)

1. The KNLP is home to the endangered brow antlered deer (Sangai).

2. The KNLP is located in the Bishnupur district of Meghalaya.

3. The national park is characterized by floating decomposed plant material locally called phumdi.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only
B. 2 & 3 only
C. 1 & 3 only
D. All of the above

116. Bollgard I and Bollgard II technologies are mentioned in the context of (Level – Difficult) PYQ (2021)

A. Clonal propagation of crop plants
B. Developing genetically modified crop plants
C. Production of plant growth substances
D. Production of bio-fertilisers

117. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Kaliningrad? (Level – Medium)

1. It is Russia's westernmost federal entity.

2. It shares no borders with Mainland Russia and is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania.

Options:

A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

118. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Sickle Cell Disease? (Level – Medium)

1. It is an inherited disease.

2. It affects the white blood cells and makes the body prone to infections.

3. India has the highest number of sickle cell disease cases in the world.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 1 only

D. 3 only

119. Which of the following best describes the newly launched NIRYAT Portal? (Level – Easy)

A. It will provide real-time import and export data of India.

B. It aims to be a repository of information on all Union government schemes aimed at promoting exports from India.

C. It would provide a platform to mentor first-generation entrepreneurs on foreign trade using counselling, training and outreach programmes.

D. It is a registration portal for exporters seeking to avail of benefits under the Niryat Bandhu Scheme.

120. Consider the following pairs of regional agricultural products and the associated states. (Level – Difficult)

Agricultural produce	Associated state
1. Lakadong turmeric	Meghalaya
2. Chak-hao rice	Nagaland
3. Queen pineapple	Tripura
4. Thuku elaichi	Manipur

How many of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

A. One pair only

B. Two pairs only

C. Three pairs only

D. All the above four pairs

121. In the context of any country, which one of the following would be considered as part of its social capital? (Level – Medium) PYQ (2019)

A. The proportion of literates in the population

B. The stock of its buildings, other infrastructure and machines

C. The size of population in the working age group

D. The level of mutual trust and harmony in the society

122. Consider the following statements with regards to invasive species: (Level – Difficult)

1. A species is termed invasive if it's previously absent in that ecosystem and has been introduced in that area from outside mostly by human intervention.

2. Invasive growth of the grass Paspalum distichum has changed the ecological character of large areas of the Keoladeo National Park, reducing its suitability for certain waterbird species including the Siberian Crane.

3. The Ministry of Environment and Forests issues approval along with quarantine certificates for the export of wild animals and articles under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

123. Consider the following statements with regards to Intelligence Bureau: (Level – Medium)

1. IB was founded on December 23, 1887, as the "Central Special Branch" by the Secretary of State for India in London.

2. IB technically falls under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau (DIB) has always been an IPS officer.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

124. VL-SRSAM missile system, often seen in the news, stands for (Level – Easy)

A. Very Light – Short Range Surface to Air Missile

B. Vertical Launch – Short Range Surface to Air Missile

C. Vertical Launch – Supersonic Range Surface to Air Missile

D. 5th generation Launch – Short Range Surface to Air Missile

125. Consider the following statements with regards to NITI Aayog: (Level – Easy)

1. The ex-officio chairman of the NITI Aayog is the Prime Minister.

2. Vice-Chairperson of the NITI Aayog is appointed by the President of India.

3. The CEO of NITI Aayog will be in the rank of the Secretary to the Government of India.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

126. At the national level, which ministry is the nodal agency to ensure effective implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006? (Level – Easy) [UPSC 2021]

A. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

B. Ministry of Panchayati Raj

C. Ministry of Rural Development

D. Ministry of Tribal Affairs

127. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to salt production in India? (Difficulty level- Difficult)

1. India is the world's largest producer of salt.

2. Among the states, Rajasthan accounts for the largest salt production in India.

3. Salt produced from mining accounts for around 30% of the total salt production in India.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

C. 3 only

D. None of the above

128. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct? (Difficulty level- Medium)

1. The levy and collection of GST compensation cess has been extended till March 2026.

2. The revenue collected from this cess will be used to compensate the states for any shortfall in their revenue collections under the GST system until March 2026.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

129. Consider the following statements about solid state batteries and liquid electrolyte batteries? (Difficulty level- Difficult)

1. The solid-state batteries are safer than batteries using liquid electrolytes.

2. A solid-state battery has higher energy density than a Li-ion battery that uses liquid electrolyte solution.

3. The solid- state batteries can charge faster than liquid electrolyte batteries.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

130. Consider the following birds.

1. Banasura Chilappan

2. Ceylon Frogmouth

3. Jerdon's nightjar

4. Great Hornbill

How many of the above birds are found in the state of Kerala? (Difficulty level- Difficult)

A. One only

B. Two only

C. Three only

D. All the above four

131. The Chairmen of public sector banks are selected by the (Difficulty level- Easy)

A. Banks Board Bureau

B. Reserve Bank of India

C. Union Ministry of Finance

D. Management of concerned bank

132. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian classical dance forms. (Level – Medium)

1. Bharatnatyam is the oldest among all classical dance forms in India and traces its origins to sadir- the solo dance performance of temple dancers or devadasis in Tamil Nadu.

2. Odissi dance is accompanied by Hindustani music and the tribhanga posture is innate to it

3. Kathak is the traditional dance form of Uttar Pradesh and an important feature of it is the development of different gharanas.

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Which of the given statements are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

133. Consider the following statements with respect to Ranji trophy, the domestic first-class cricket championship. (Level – Difficult)

1. The Ranji Trophy sees participation from all 28 states and eight union territories of India

2. Maharashtra has won the Ranji Trophy the most times.

3. Madhya Pradesh has won the 2021-22 Ranji Trophy by beating Karnataka in the finals.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

C. 3 only

D. None of the above statements

134. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Mithun (Gayal)? (Level – Difficult)

1. It is a semi-domesticated bovine species considered to be a descendent from the wild

2. Indian Gaur.

3. It is found only in North-eastern states of India.

4. It is the state animal of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1, 2 and 3

D. 1 and 3 only

135. Consider the following pair of cities/towns and the associated industries. (Level – Medium)

City/Town	Associated Industry
1. Tiruppur	Textiles and garments
2. Jalandhar	Sports goods
3. Surat	Diamond
4. Titagarh	Paper

How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?

A. One only

B. Two only

C. Three only

D. All four pairs

136. In India, the use of carbofuran, methyl parathion, phorate and triazophos is viewed with apprehension. These chemicals are used as (Difficulty level- Difficult)

A. Pesticides in agriculture

B. Preservatives in processed foods

C. Fruit-ripening agents

D. Moisturising agents in cosmetics

137. Consider the following statements with regards to the anti-defection law: (Level – Easy)

1. The law originally protected the Speaker's decision from judicial review.

2. This safeguard was struck down in Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu and Others (1992).

3. MPs and MLAs disqualified under the anti-defection law are barred from contesting elections for a period of 6 years.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

138. Consider the following statements with regards to Small Savings Schemes: (Level – Easy)

1. Collections from all small savings instruments are credited to the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF).

2. Small Saving Schemes can be grouped under three heads: Post Office Deposits, Savings Certificates and Social Security Schemes.

3. Sukanya Samriddhi scheme is also a part of the Small Savings Schemes.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

139. Consider the following statements: (Level – Difficult)

1. Union Education Ministry released the Performance Grading Index (PGI) for States and Union Territories which is used as a tool to provide insights on the status of school education in States and UTs.

2. It is initiated and implemented by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL).

3. As per PGI of 2019, none of the States has districts in the top category, called the 'Daksh' category which is equal to scoring above 90% points.

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

140. Consider the following statements with regards to the World Bank Group: (Level – Easy)

1. IDA is part of the World Bank that helps the world's poorest countries by offering low or no interest loans.

2. India is a member of all bodies under the World Bank group.

3. The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) was established in 1966 by the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (the ICSID Convention).

Choose the correct code:

A. 1 & 2 only

B. 2 & 3 only

C. 1 & 3 only

D. All of the above

141. With reference to India, consider the following statements: (Level – Easy)

1. There is only one citizenship and one domicile.

2. A citizen by birth only can become the Head of State.

3. A foreigner once granted citizenship cannot be deprived of it under any circumstances.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. 1 and 3

D. 2 and 3

142. Consider the following statement/s with respect to the GST Council? (Level – Difficult)

1. GST Council is a joint forum of the Centre and the states that was set up by the President as per Article 279A (1) of the amended Constitution.

2. Recommendations of the GST Council are binding on the Union and the States.

3. Article 246A confers simultaneous or concurrent powers on Parliament and the state legislatures to make laws relating to GST.

How many of the given statements is/are INCORRECT?

A. one statement only

B. two statements only

C. All the three statements

D. None of the above

143. "Hermit" recently seen in the News is (Level – Medium)

A. Cyber Espionage Group

B. Malware

C. Spyware

D. Private search engine

144. How many of the following is/are the e-governance initiatives of the Government of India? (Level – Medium)

1. PADMA

2. PRAGATI

3. e-Kranti

4. DARPAN

Options:

A. 2 only

B. 3 only

C. All four

D. 1 only

145. Which of the given statements with respect to Ekalavya Model Residential Schools is/are Correct? (Level – Medium)

1. It is a scheme for model residential school for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes across India.

2. These are set up by grants provided under Article 275(1) of the Constitution.

3. The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Options:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

C. 1 only

D. 2 and 3 only

146. With reference to the cultural history of India, the memorizing of chronicles, dynastic histories and Epictales was the profession of who of the following? (Level – Difficult)

A. Shramana

B. Parivraaj

C. Agrahaarika

D. Maagadha

147. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to election to the Office of the Vice President of India? (Level – Medium)

1. The Vice-President is elected by an electoral college consisting of members (elected as well as nominated) of both Houses of Parliament.

2. The vote of a member from the Rajya Sabha has a higher value as compared to that of a member from the Lok Sabha.

3. Under the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote as envisaged for the election of the Vice President, an elector must compulsorily mark as many preferences as there are a number of candidates.

4. The election shall be by secret ballot and the political parties cannot issue any whip to their MPs in the matter of voting in the Vice-Presidential election.

Options:

A. 1, 2, 3 and 4

B. 1, 3 and 4 only

C. 1 and 4 only

D. 2 and 3 only

148. Consider the following statements with respect to Marine Exports from India. (Level – Medium)

1. Marine exports from India have witnessed a decline in the last three years owing to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Frozen shrimp remains the major export item from India, both in terms of quantity as well as value.

3. The USA is the topmost importer of Indian seafood both in terms of value as well as volume.

Which of the following statements are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

149. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to mRNA vaccines? (Level – Easy)

1. Unlike the traditional vaccines, mRNA vaccines do not contain a weakened/ inactivated virus but rather enables the body itself to produce the virus protein to trigger an immune response.

2. Currently, India does not have any domestically developed mRNA vaccine available in the country.

Options:

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

150. Which of the following statements best describes the Tunguska event? (Level – Difficult)

A. The largest volcanic activity ever recorded in human history.

B. The hypothetical situation in which a large asteroid impact would wipe out a substantial share of the human population.

C. The meteor air burst that occurred in 1908 leading to the destruction of vast swathes of forest in the Russian Siberian Taiga.

D. It is the largest known recording of fast radio bursts from the Hawaii Mauna Kea Observatories.

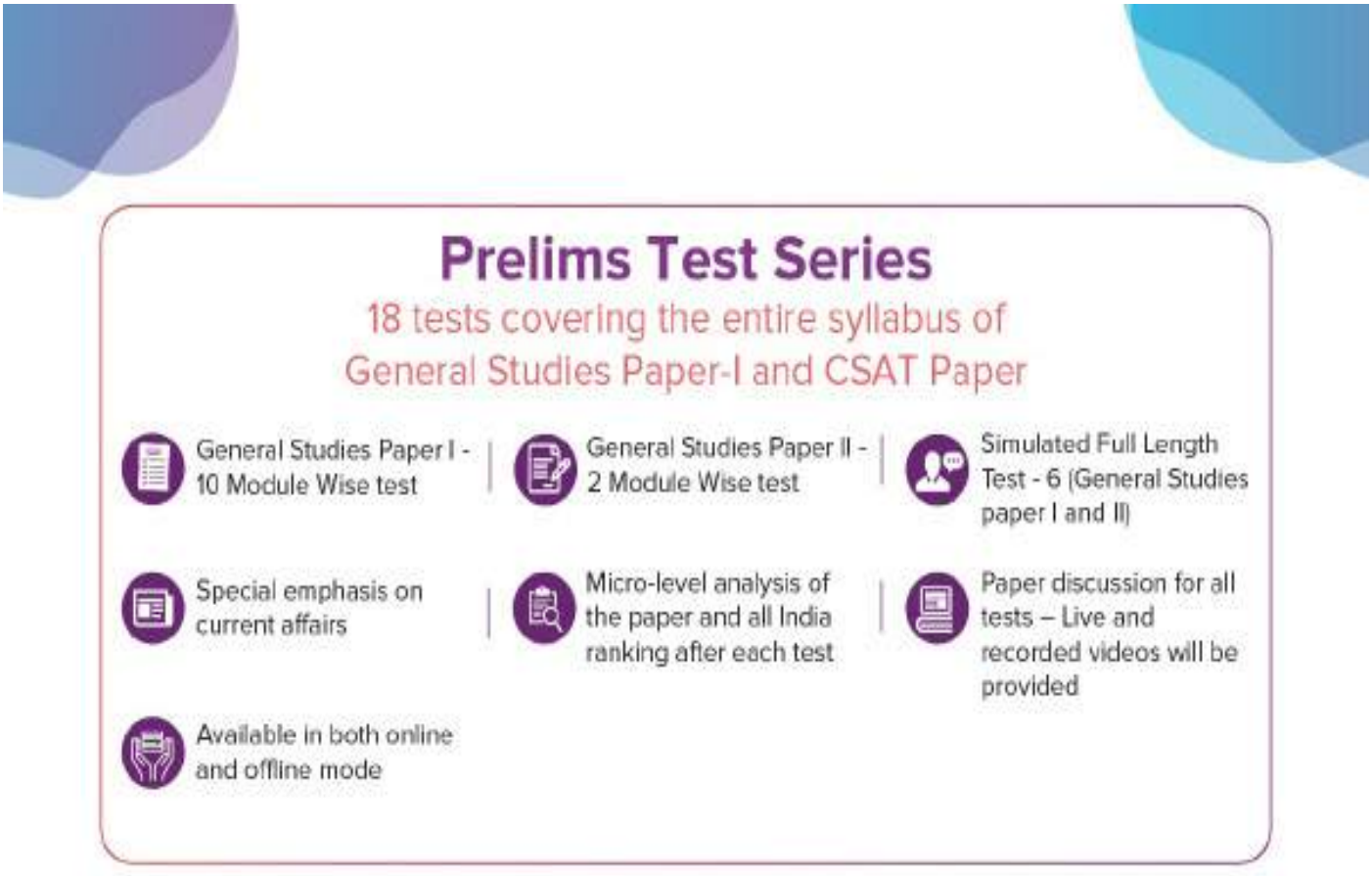
151. Which one of the following groups of plants was domesticated in the 'New World' and introduced into the 'Old World'? (Level – Difficult) PYQ (2019)

A. Tobacco, cocoa and rubber

B. Tobacco, cotton and rubber

C. Cotton, coffee and sugarcane

D. Rubber, coffee and wheat



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ATTENDANCE NO.: To be filled by the Supervisor

केन्द्र CENTRE | विषय SUBJECT | विषय कोड S. CODE | अनुक्रमाक ROLL NUMBER

पुस्तिका सिरीज BOOKLET SERIES: A B C D

विषय SUBJECT: 00 11 22 33 44 55 66 77 88 99

अनुक्रमांक ROLL NUMBER: 0000000 1111111 2222222 3333333 4444444 5555555 6666666 7777777 8888888 9999999

निर्देश : DIRECTIONS:

केवल काला बाल प्वाइंट पैन इस्तेमाल करें।

USE BLACK BALL POINT PEN ONLY

उदाहरण EXAMPLE (a) (b) ● (d)

निरीक्षक पुस्तिका सिरीज काला बाल प्वाइंट पैन से कूटबद्ध करें

BOOKLET SERIES to be coded by Invigilator with Black Ball Point Pen

(a) (b) (c) (d)

Initials of Invigilator in Black Ball Point Pen

निरीक्षक काला बाल प्वाइंट पैन से आद्याक्षर करें

1	a	b	c	d	41	a	b	c	d	81	a	b	c	d	121	a	b	c	d
2	a	b	c	d	42	a	b	c	d	82	a	b	c	d	122	a	b	c	d
3	a	b	c	d	43	a	b	c	d	83	a	b	c	d	123	a	b	c	d
4	a	b	c	d	44	a	b	c	d	84	a	b	c	d	124	a	b	c	d
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6	a	b	c	d	46	a	b	c	d	86	a	b	c	d	126	a	b	c	d
7	a	b	c	d	47	a	b	c	d	87	a	b	c	d	127	a	b	c	d
8	a	b	c	d	48	a	b	c	d	88	a	b	c	d	128	a	b	c	d
9	a	b	c	d	49	a	b	c	d	89	a	b	c	d	129	a	b	c	d
10	a	b	c	d	50	a	b	c	d	90	a	b	c	d	130	a	b	c	d
11	a	b	c	d	51	a	b	c	d	91	a	b	c	d	131	a	b	c	d
12	a	b	c	d	52	a	b	c	d	92	a	b	c	d	132	a	b	c	d
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34	a	b	c	d	74	a	b	c	d	114	a	b	c	d	154	a	b	c	d
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36	a	b	c	d	76	a	b	c	d	116	a	b	c	d	156	a	b	c	d
37	a	b	c	d	77	a	b	c	d	117	a	b	c	d	157	a	b	c	d
38	a	b	c	d	78	a	b	c	d	118	a	b	c	d	158	a	b	c	d
39	a	b	c	d	79	a	b	c	d	119	a	b	c	d	159	a	b	c	d
40	a	b	c	d	80	a	b	c	d	120	a	b	c	d	160	a	b	c	d

कृपया इस जगह पर कोई निशान न लगायें

PLEASE DO NOT MAKE ANY MARKS IN THIS AREA

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ANSWER KEYS

1	D
2	D
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21	C
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25	A
26	B
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28	C
29	D
30	B
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32	C
33	A
34	B
35	B
36	C
37	A
38	D
39	D
40	B

CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION

41	A
42	A
43	D
44	A
45	C
46	D
47	A
48	C
49	B
50	B
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70	D
71	B
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73	B
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75	D
76	C
77	D
78	B
79	A
80	D

CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION

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81	A
82	B
83	D
84	B
85	A
86	A
87	D
88	B
89	A
90	A
91	D
92	D
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109	A
110	B
111	C
112	D
113	A
114	D
115	C
116	B
117	C
118	C
119	A
120	B

CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION

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121	D
122	D
123	D
124	B
125	C
126	D
127	D
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129	D
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135	D
136	A
137	A
138	D
139	D
140	C

141	A
142	A
143	C
144	C
145	D
146	D
147	C
148	B
149	A
150	C
151	A

CLICK HERE TO READ EXPLANATION

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

GS Paper 1

Social Issues

1. How does the surrogacy law in India aim to handle surrogacy related problems in the country? Elaborate. (250 words; 15 marks)
2. Since child marriage is rampant in India, will increasing the age of marriage for women solve this issue? Discuss and suggest a way to end child marriage. (250 words; 15 marks)
3. Castes in India play a significant role in economic transformation. Analyze. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

GS Paper 2

Polity and Governance

1. What is Article 142 of the Indian constitution? Does it go against the doctrine of separation of powers? Elaborate. (250 words; 15 marks)
2. Examine the challenges in reforming the death penalty sentencing. (250 words; 15 marks)
3. There is a fine line between the government's regulations of social media and the government's restriction on free speech. Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks)
4. Encounter killings by the police are disturbingly on the rise. Suggest measures to prevent police excesses to fix toxic policing. (250 words, 15 marks)
5. In its current form, the CAG of India is far from the kind of office that Ambedkar had envisaged. In this context, discuss the reforms needed to make the CAG of India more effective.
6. Demolition drives conducted in multiple States violate 'due process'. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
7. Language of the laws in India should be Gender Neutral. Examine. (10 marks, 150 words)
8. Candidates should not be allowed to contest elections from more than one constituency. Do you agree? Justify. (10 marks, 150 words)
9. Should the government pursue the policy of reservations in the private sector? Critically Analyze. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
10. What do you understand by the term 'Judicial Overreach'? Examine in the context of Allahabad High Court's recent directions regarding misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. (250 words; 15 marks)
11. Critically evaluate the controversy surrounding Section 66A of the IT Act, with emphasis on the Supreme Court's ruling in the Shreya Singhal case. (250 words; 15 marks)
12. Increasing the retirement age of Supreme Court judges is a sure shot way to reform the higher judiciary. Do you agree? Critically discuss. (250 words, 15 marks)
13. Anti-defection law has been rendered meaningless due to loopholes in the law. Explain the statement with relevant examples. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
14. Instead of expanding contractual employment, the Government should seek to bolster public services. Substantiate. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
15. Discuss the various initiatives taken by the Government of India to propel the fisheries sector in India. (250 words; 15 marks)

International Relations

1. Analyse the significance of the Indus Water Treaty. Should India consider using it as a leverage against Pakistan for its sponsorship of terrorism? (250 words; 15 marks)

2. Rather than focusing on the Kashmir issue, India Pakistan relations can benefit considerably by focusing on low hanging fruits such as the Sir Creek dispute, Siachen and resumption of bilateral trade. Do you agree? Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks)

3. What are the biggest impediments in India – US trade? Suggest ways to overcome the same. (250 words; 15 marks)

4. India should ensure that the newly envisioned IPEF (Indo Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity) is more pro-India than anti-China. Discuss. (250 words, 15 marks)

5. The nations that are supposed to be the guardians of International institutions are the ones weakening them. Comment. (250 words; 15 marks)

6. Vicious domestic politics have foreign policy implications. Do you agree? Justify. (150 words, 10 marks)

7. Pakistan's inclusion in the FATF 'grey list' has a major impact on its economy. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

8. Why was the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) established? What has been its role in the international arena? (10 Marks, 150 Words)

9. As the U S. and China intensify their rivalry, other countries are faced with hard choices. Where does this leave India? Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks)

10. Every crisis in our neighbourhood presents an opportunity for India to play the role of a regional leader. Discuss with examples. (250 words, 15 marks)

11. Julian Assange's extradition from UK to US approved by home secretary, would undermine the role of journalists across the world in bringing governments to account. Critically examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

12. Black Sea is critical for Russia for geo-economic reasons. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

13. Discuss the possible reasons for the worsening economic crisis in Pakistan. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

14. India's move to send a multi-member team of senior diplomats to Afghanistan to interact with Taliban is a step in the right direction. Do you agree? Justify (15 Marks, 250 Words)

15. Examine China's expanding geopolitical presence in Africa and highlight how Indian and Chinese involvement in Africa differs in intent, methods and outcomes. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

16. Rather than focusing on the Kashmir issue, India Pakistan relations can benefit considerably by focusing on low hanging fruits such as the Sir Creek dispute, Siachen and resumption of bilateral trade. Do you agree? Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks)

17. Within a short span of time, Israel has emerged as one of India's most significant partners in many areas. Comment. (250 words; 15 marks)

Social Justice

1. Judicial decisions allowing rape perpetrators to marry victims violate the principle of rule of law. Discuss. (250 words, 15 marks)

2. Despite claims of bringing transparency and ensuring proper monitoring of the schemes the National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) App is beset with challenges. Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

3. Has the emergence of All Women Police Stations (AWPS) assisted in curbing violence against women? Critically Evaluate. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

4. Discuss the conditions under which Indian women can safely terminate pregnancies. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

Health

1. Discuss the likely origins, symptoms, modes of transmission and treatment for monkeypox. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Education

1. The idea of establishing the Digital University in India will transform the education landscape of the country. Critically Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

GS Paper 3

Economy

1. Assess the performance of FAME II scheme across the country and the roadblocks that still remain in place in expanding the EV accessibility in India. (250 words; 15 marks)
2. What has led to the selloff by foreign portfolio investors? Does it affect ongoing economic recovery? (10 Marks, 150 Words)
3. What is a Bad Bank? How far would it go in resolving the problem of NPAs in India? (250 words; 15 marks)
4. Discuss the salient features of the Patents Act in India and examine the stumbling blocks between India and the USA on the Intellectual Property front. (250 words, 15 marks)
5. Discuss the concerns voiced by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) over regulation of cryptos. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
6. Global food prices have been soaring over the last two years. Examine the factors responsible and the way to tackle the crisis. (250 words; 15 marks)
7. Write a note on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and explain why the Indian economy is not generating enough jobs? (10 Marks, 150 Words)
8. Write a note on key takeaways from the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
9. GST which was supposed to have simplified the tax regime has instead complicated it with different tax slabs. Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
10. The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) platform aims to create new opportunities and curb digital monopolies. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
11. Ignoring the protocol under Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM), if states continue with fiscal profligacy, they will be heading towards unsustainable high debt with catastrophic consequences for macro-economic stability. Suggest reforms to keep a check on freebie culture. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Environment and Ecology

1. Evaluate the idea of tradeable 'Extended Producer Responsibility' certificates for the purpose of giving a push to electronic waste recycling in India. Also, point out the challenges associated with this idea. (250 words; 15 marks) (GS III – Environment)
2. Evaluate the current status of sewage treatment in India. Why are we still lagging far behind in treating the majority of the sewage produced in India? (250 words, 15 marks) [GS-3, Environment]
3. Should the Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi be allowed to restart its operations? Critically Analyze. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS Paper 3/Environment and Ecology)
4. Discuss the benefits of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES). (10 Marks, 150 Words)

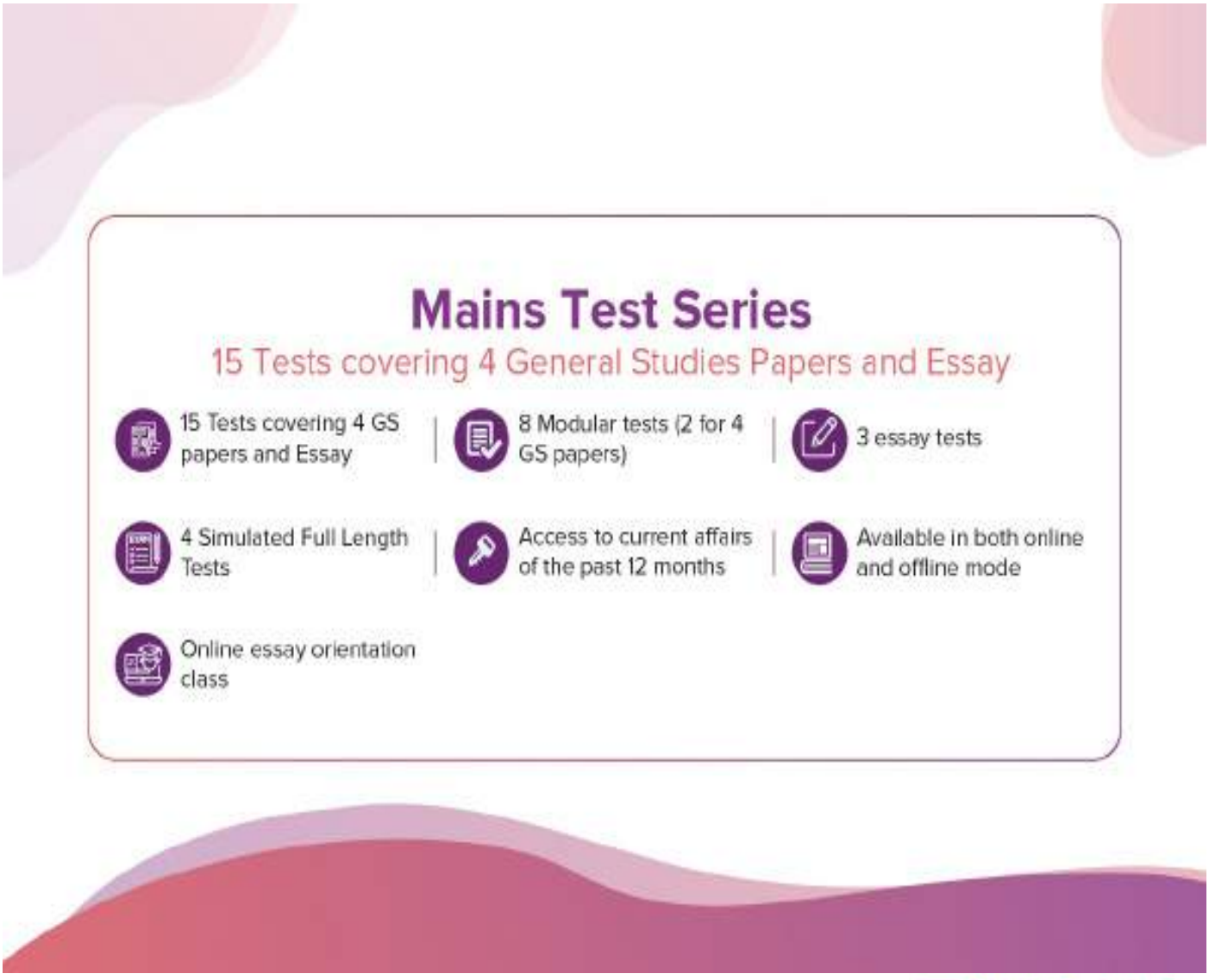
Science and Technology

1. Is there a possibility of future Artificial Intelligence technologies becoming 'conscious'? Critically examine the concerns. (250 words; 15 marks)

2. How would 5G be different from the earlier telecommunication technologies? What are the possible applications of 5G technology? (250 words, 15 marks)

3. Examine UNESCO's global agreement on the ethics of AI in detail. (250 words, 15 marks)

4. What do you understand about the Internet of Things (IoT)? Discuss its various applications and ways to safeguard applications from potential risk. (15 Marks, 250 Words)



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Candidate Details:

- Name: Saumya Sharma
- Rank: 9 (CSE 2017)
- Hometown: Delhi
- Education: Graduated in B.A. LL.B. (Hons.), from National Law University, Delhi in June 2017.
- Hobbies: Travelling, Reading, Photography, Map reading.
- Optional subject: Law

Interview details:

- Interview duration: 35 minutes
- Questions were mainly asked from the Detailed Application Form (DAF) and Current Affairs.

Graduation and optional based questions:

- You have worked in very crucial sectors, how do think this will help in civil service?
- What are the challenges faced by the water sector in India? Give some data on water availability in India. Do you think that the Central Water Commission (CWC) is doing good job?
- Was your previous jobs gender-sensitive?

Current affairs based questions:

- How will India-U.S. relations be affected by the election of Mr. Donald Trump as the U.S. President?
- Has Demonetization served its intended purpose?
- What do you mean by Net neutrality? Why is it important?
- What do you mean by Equalization levy? Why is it necessary?
- What do you mean by wilful defaulters and how should the state deal with them?

Hobby based question:

- If one travels from Delhi to Sudan via road, what all countries will one across?

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