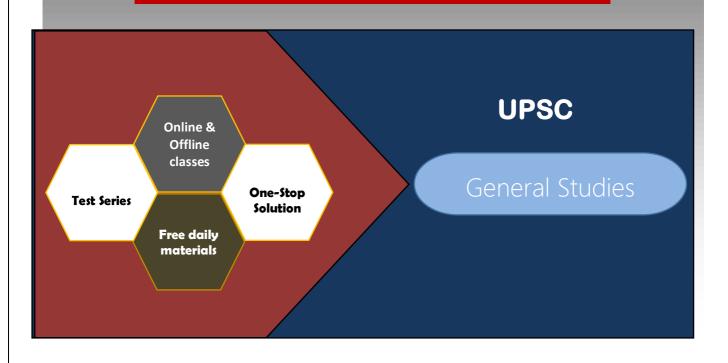**V | VISHNU I A S ★ ★**

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

Context:

Recently, the West Bengal Chief Minister asked why India should have only one capital and suggested that there be four. She suggested that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in a rotating manner.

History:

- Calcutta (now Kolkata) was once the capital of this country until King George V announced in December 1911 that Delhi would be the new capital.
- Parliament House was opened in 1927 and the magnificent Viceroy's residence (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the government buildings were inaugurated in 1931.
- One of the factors that may have weighed in favour of New Delhi could be its proximity to the summer capital, Shimla.

Feasibility of the proposal:

- Four capitals would obviously mean having Parliament buildings in three other regions, too.

Accommodation:

- If there are four capitals, accommodation for all the MPs and the adjunct staff will have to be constructed.
- While those from the northern parts of the country would prefer to be comfortably ensconced in the existing residential accommodation in New Delhi, those from other parts of the country may prefer to settle in the capital of the region to which they belong.
- After the Parliament sessions, these residential accommodations would be vacant for months after every session.
- In addition to this, huge expenditure would be involved in all the MPs and their staff having to fly to and from these capitals every now and then.

Security:

- Providing security to all the MPs will be a huge burden for the State Police.
- Vacant accommodations where the MPs don't reside would also have to be guarded round the clock.
- Depending on the risk factor, enhanced security will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of them.

Expenditure:

- Even shifting a State capital would involve huge expenditure.
- The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's proposal to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli was eventually shelved when it became apparent that it would impose a huge burden on the state exchequer.
- The cost to the government exchequer to have capitals in three other States will be mind-boggling and our nation can ill-afford this.

A proposal to be considered:

- In 2021, a similar request was made when the Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India.
- This has been a long-standing demand.
- Unlike the proposal to establish four capitals, this one merits serious consideration.
- The proposal needs consideration given the prohibitively long distance between the southern states and Delhi.
  - Not many can afford to travel all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases.
  - The exorbitant fees of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another deterrent.
- Also, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of the Court of Appeal with 15 judges each be created across the country to reduce the burden of the Supreme Court.

Merits:

- This would enable judges to go through each case thoroughly and deliver a well-thought-out verdict.
- Setting up these courts would call for an amendment in the Constitution. Though the demand is to set up a bench in the south, southern Bar Councils may later take up the issue of setting up separate appellate benches in regions in the south.
- Such an arrangement would leave the apex court free to deal with constitutional issues.

- With a huge number of cases pending in various courts, a viable solution needs to be worked out.
- Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

2. An India-EU trade pact may still remain elusive

The article throws light upon how COVID-19, Brexit and international tensions have unsettled the European Union and exacerbated its internal discords.

Challenges facing the European Union:

- Before COVID-19 and Brexit, the EU had the same GDP as the United States and was one of India's major trade and investment partners.
- Being the largest democracies and unions of linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse States, both the EU and India are well suited for a special relationship.
- The reality is that the current status lacks mutual chemistry.
- Also, the EU now finds itself in an unusually turbulent situation.
    o The crises of 2020 made the structural lack of unity in the EU apparent.
    o Despite its desire for greater integration, it faces obstacles from adherence to the rule of law to a strategy for dealing with China, Russia, Turkey and Iran.
    o After months of tortuous negotiation over Hungary and Poland's objections, member States finally agreed on a long-term budget and a COVID-19 recovery package of $2 trillion.
    o The two countries had opposed anti-COVID-19 support being linked to good governance, in particular, to accusations of suppression of human rights and lack of independence in the judiciary.
- The Trump presidency forced Europe to reassess its relationship with America.
    o This stimulated the EU's drive for greater self-reliance in security, economics, supply chains and climate change, and an attempt to emerge as a major global pillar alongside the United States and China.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced divisive vaccine nationalism into the Union.

Shadow of Euroscepticism:

- Euroscepticism is criticism of the European Union and European integration. It is the opposition to increasing the powers of the European Union.

- The EU's attempt to condition its budget on the rule of law during the pandemic and recession only sharpened the emphasis on the veto power to which every member state is entitled.
- It was not only Britain that spawned a populist movement agitating to leave the EU. Europe's many Eurosceptic parties now focus on preventing closer unity.
- Elections are due in many EU states, including Germany and the Netherlands, both of which have strong Eurosceptic movements.

India-EU trade pact:

- India plans to start negotiations on investment and trade agreements with the European Union (EU).
- These are likely to run into the same problems as the discussions that began on a comprehensive free trade agreement in 2007. It was aborted due to differences on:
  - Movement of professionals, labour, human rights and environmental issues.
  - India's high tariffs, inconsistent tax regime and non-payment of arbitral awards.

Conclusion:

For the EU to resolve these innumerable and diverse problems without further widening existing ruptures will require enormous political will and polished skill. Trade agreements with India will be the least of its problems.

3. Sri Lanka considering India's grant instead of China project

Context:

In a bid to displace a Chinese company that had won the contract to install renewable energy systems in three small islands off Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, India has offered a grant of $12 million to execute it.

Details:

- The development comes less than a month after the Cabinet cleared a project to install hybrid renewable energy systems in Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu, located in the Palk Bay, some 50 km off Tamil Nadu.

- Recently, Sri Lanka cleared a Chinese energy project in three islands off the Jaffna peninsula that are barely 50 km from the Tamil Nadu coast.

- Sri Lanka's Minister of Power said that the government would consider India's proposal.

Note:

It remains to be seen if India's proposal gets official clearance, but India's swift offer comes in the wake of being ejected — along with Japan — out of the East Container Terminal (ECT) development project at the Colombo Port.

4. Kiran Bedi removed as Puducherry L-G

Context:

Kiran Bedi has been removed as the Lieutenant-Governor of Puducherry. Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan has been given additional charge of the Union Territory until regular arrangements are made.

Details:

The Puducherry Lt Governor and the Puducherry Chief Minister have been locked in a tussle over several issues in the past.

Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry:

- UT of Puducherry is headed by the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry as its nominal head, with a democratically elected Chief Minister as the real head of the executive.
- Other union territories don't have an elected government and legislative assembly.
- Puducherry, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir (newly formed UT) are the three territories that have democratically elected governments like Indian states.
- Rules of Business of the Government of Puducherry, Government of UTs Act, 1963 and the constitutional provisions expect the Lieutenant Governor to act as a bridge between the local government and the Centre.
- The manner in which the LG functions vis-à-vis the elected government (Council of Ministers) is also spelt out in the Rules of Business of the Government of Pondicherry, 1963, issued on June 22, 1963.

- Under Rule 47, which deals with persons serving in the UT government, the Administrator exercises powers regulating the conditions of service of such persons in consultation with the Chief Minister. In case the LG has a difference of opinion with the Chief Minister, he/she can refer the matter to the central government for the decision of the President.

Note:

- Lt. Governors are appointed by the President of India for a term of five years.
- The LG holds office at the pleasure of the President.

5. Freedom and security

The article talks about the social media platforms operating in India and suggests that the government must view freedom of speech as an aid, not an impediment, to national security.

Background:

- Recently, the Indian government and Twitter were at loggerheads over issues related to content removal and freedom of expression.
- The Centre had expressed deep disappointment over the microblogging platform's partial compliance of its orders grudgingly and with substantial delay.

Social Media and Freedom of Speech:

- Social media has not just confined its wings to sharing information and pictures.
- It has now become a platform for sharing thoughts, ideas, and reviews thus exercising freedom of speech to the amplest.
- While the Constitution of India grants the right to freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right, it is not an absolute right.
- It does not give immunity for every possible use of language and prescribes punishment for those who abuse this freedom.
- It allows the govt. of India to frame laws and to impose restrictions in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India.
- The legislature has the power to enact laws under Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression to impose restrictions on the following grounds:
  - Sovereignty and Integrity of India
  - Defamation
  - National Security

- o Public Order
- o Decency
- o Friendly relations with foreign states.

Details:

- The government of India has called on the social media platforms operating in India to follow the law of the land.
- The Minister of IT and Communications said that while criticisms are welcome, when social media is used to propagate hate, action would be taken.
- The issue is still in the realm of statements and counter-statements.
- While keeping up the pressure on Twitter by threatening to take action, the government seems to have stopped short of taking action.
- While being defiant initially, Twitter also seems to have stopped short of escalating it and going to court.
- If either one of the parties had decided to escalate the issue, the contentious law under which social media platforms are required to comply with blocking orders could come under legal scrutiny.
    - o The reference is to Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
    - o Under the provision of the Act, the government can order a digital intermediary to block any content on grounds including security of the state and public order.

- The Supreme Court did uphold the constitutionality of Section 69A in the Shreya Singhal vs. the Union of India case in 2015.
- However, criticism over the secrecy of the process and the arbitrariness with which it has been used over the years has never ceased.
- This Section, in a way, represents the wide censorship powers that the government has.

Conclusion:

- Social media has been a provider of a platform for people to express themselves.
- It has not only made citizens more informed but has helped in shaping the laws and legislations according to the needs of the public.
- Citizen awareness and consciousness are important for a successful democracy.
- Diversity of opinions is essential to enable the citizens to have informed judgments.

- While it is important to regulate social media content, it is important to see freedom of speech as one of the key facilitators of security of state instead of looking at it as an antithesis of security.

6. Combating vaccine hesitancy

Context:

Poor communication and lack of transparency on vaccine efficacy data have produced vaccine hesitancy, resulting in low uptake in some States.

Vaccine Hesitancy:

- According to the World Health Organization, vaccine hesitancy is defined as a reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccine services.
- Vaccine hesitancy is as old as the concept of vaccination itself.
- However, in times of uncertainty, people are particularly susceptible to misinformation due to an intricate combination of cognitive, social and algorithmic biases i.e., information overload and limited attention spans.

Issues:

- The debates around hesitancy for COVID-19 vaccines include concerns over safety, efficacy, and side effects due to the record-breaking timelines of the vaccines, competition among several companies, misinformation, and religious taboos.
- Social media has seen a rising number of self-proclaimed experts who have been decoding the ingredients and efficacy of the vaccines through unsubstantiated claims.
- Misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines may seriously dent the fight against the pandemic.

Way Forward:

- People can choose to not be inoculated, but to break the chain of transmission, it is imperative to have the right strategy in place.
- Instead of anti-vaxxers, the target audience must be the swing population i.e., people who are sceptical but can be persuaded through scientific facts and proper communication.
- The second measure is to pause before sharing any unverified news from social media.

- There is a need to inculcate the habit to fact-check any news related to COVID-19 vaccines.
- The third measure is to use the celebrity effect — the ability of prominent personalities to influence others to take vaccines.
- The infodemic around vaccines can be tackled only by actively debunking myths, misinformation and fake news on COVID-19 vaccines.

7. Telcos ask government to defer net neutrality rules

What's in News?

The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) has urged the government to bring over-the-top (OTT) service providers such as WhatsApp under the licensing regime and defer net neutrality rules on telecom operators till the time 'same service, same rules' are applied on the applications.

- The net neutrality principles prohibit service providers from discriminating against Internet content and services by blocking, throttling or according preferential higher speeds.
- The COAI wrote to the Telecom Department in response to the recommendation of the TRAI on OTT players that no regulations should be imposed on the calling and messaging apps till the time clarity emerges in the international jurisdictions.
- Till the time any decision is taken regarding licensing of OTT communication providers, the unequitability between TSPs (telecom service providers) and OTTs should not be increased further, it said.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

8. Cairn files case in U.S. to push India to pay $1.2 bn award

Context:

Cairn Energy has filed a case in a U.S. district court to enforce a $1.2 billion arbitration award it won in a tax dispute against India, pressure on the government to pay its dues.

Details:

- In December 2020, an arbitration body awarded the British firm damages of more than $1.2 billion plus interest and costs.

- The tribunal ruled India breached an investment treaty with Britain and said New Delhi was liable to pay.

- Cairn has now asked the U.S. court to recognise and confirm the award, including payments due since 2014 and interest compounded semi-annually.
- Cairn aims to enforce the award under international arbitration rules, commonly called the New York Convention, and recover losses caused by India's "unfair and inequitable treatment of their investments".

- The New York Arbitration Convention is also known as the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards.
- It was first adopted by the United Nations diplomatic conference on 10 June 1958 and was enforced on 7 June 1959.
- It requires courts of the contracting states to give effect to an agreement to arbitrate when seized of an action in a matter covered by an arbitration agreement and also to recognize and enforce awards made in other states, subject to specific limited exceptions.
- It was adopted mainly for promoting healthy business relations between the countries and to promote harmony and coordination among the states.

9. Lab study to trace origin of disaster

Context:

A team of scientists at the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) in Dehradun is analysing fragments of ice, rock and mud in their labs to better understand the origins of the disaster that took place at Chamoli in Uttarakhand.

What is glacial burst?

- A glacial outburst is an uncommon event that occurs when the water dammed by a glacier or moraine is released.
- The glacier containing the body of water melts and overflows the glacier.
- Retreating glaciers, like several in the Himalayas, usually result in the formation of lakes at their tips, called proglacial lakes, often bound only by sediments and boulders.
    - o If the boundaries of these lakes are breached, it can lead to large amounts of water rushing down to nearby streams and rivers, gathering momentum on the way by picking up sediments, rocks and other material, and resulting in flooding downstream.
- Glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events are not unusual, but their impact depends on the size of the proglacial lake that burst, and location.

- o The breach can be caused by several reasons — in this particular case, an avalanche was reported in the region two days ago.
- o Other causes could be earthquake, heavy rainfall, snowmelt, longterm dam degradation, etc.

Impact:

- The glacial burst led to the rising of water levels in the river Rishiganga, which washed away the Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW.
- The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river Dhauliganga (which is a tributary of the river Alaknanda).
  - o Tapovan-Vishnugad project has an installed capacity of 520 MW.
- It led to rippling flash floods in the Dhauliganga and the Rishiganga and also impacted the Alaknanda.
- One motorable road and four suspension bridges connecting around eight villages in the area with the district headquarters have also been washed away by the avalanche.

- Dhauliganga originates from Vasudhara Tal, perhaps the largest glacial lake in Uttarakhand.
  - o It flows in a meandering course, which takes it through the Nanda Devi National Park.
- Dhauliganga is joined by Rishiganga river at Raini, where the disaster at the power project dam took place.
- The river takes a V-turn and continues to flow in the opposite direction, toward north as the Dhauliganga for another 30-odd km, through Tapovan, until it is joined by the Alaknanda at Vishnuprayag near Joshimath.

What triggered the glacial burst?

- Scientists are not sure what triggered the sudden surge of water near Chamoli in Uttarakhand.
  - o Such a glacial burst is an extremely rare event.
  - o They suspect the impact of climate change or development.
  - o Environmental experts attributed the Nanda Devi glacial melt to global warming.
    - ▪ Climate change has driven erratic weather patterns like increased snowfall and rainfall, and warmer winters had led to the melting of a lot of snow.
    - ▪ According to the latest assessment reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of the

mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes.

- It is also predicted that the number and area of glacier lakes will continue to increase in most regions in the coming decades, and new lakes will develop closer to steep and potentially unstable mountain walls, where lake outbursts can be more easily triggered.

o What scientists are certain of is that the incident was not a result of any glacier breaking off. In fact, glaciers are not known to break in a manner that ice-sheets in the polar regions do.

Measures taken:

Rescue:

- Dams in Shrinagar and Rishikesh were emptied out.
- People along riverbanks were evacuated.
- Apart from the local police and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), four columns of the Army were also deployed for rescue operations.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. In difficult times, Fifteenth Finance Commission rose to the challenge

Unique challenges

- Many new and unique demands were placed on the 15th Finance Commission.
- The major challenge being addressing **the issue of the 2011 population census** evoking a sharp response from the southern states.
- Other issues include the **non-lapsable defence fund** and the use of certain parameters for **performance incentives.**
- The Commission was also required to perform the task of **assessing and projecting the fiscal roadmap** for the Union and state amid an uncertain domestic environment due to shortfall in the GST collection, further accentuated in the year 2020 by the global pandemic.

Key recommendations

The Commission, in its final report, recommended vertical devolution at 41 per cent, adjusting 1 per cent for the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

1) Horizontal distribution

- For horizontal distribution, the commission has tried to harmonise the principles of **expenditure needs, equity and performance.**
- This is achieved by the introduction of **efficiency criteria of tax and fiscal efforts** and by assigning 12.5 per cent weight to demographic performance.
- Consideration of **demographic performance** will help in resolving the demographic debate and incentivising states in moving towards the **replacement rate of population growth.**

2) Principles governing grant-in-aid

- Grants are important as they are more directly targeted and equalise the standards of basic social services to some extent.
- The Commission has recommended a total grant of Rs 10,33,062 crore during 2021-26.
- Grant is broadly characterised into: (a) revenue deficit grants (b) grants for local governments (c) grants for **disaster management** (d) sector-specific grants and (e) state-specific grants.
- Many of these grants are linked with **performance-based criteria,** thereby promoting principles of **transparency, accountability**, and leading to better monitoring of expenditures.
- However, the Commission was asked to examine whether **revenue deficit grants** should be provided at all to the states.
- Some states stressed that revenue deficit grants have serious **disincentives for tax efforts** and prudence in expenditure and, hence, these should be discontinued.
- Fiscally stressed states of Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab are regular recipients of these grants due to high debt legacy.

3) Conditional grants to local bodies

- This Commission's grant for local government is different from that of its predecessors for the set of entry-level conditions:
- (a) Constitution of State Finance Commissions.
- (b) Timely auditing and online availability of accounts for rural local bodies coupled with
- (c) Notifying consistent growth rate for property tax revenue for urban local bodies.

- Secondly, the recommendations are in alignment with the national programmes of Swachch Bharat Mission and Jal Jeewan Mission.

4) Incubation of new cities and urban grants

- It is for the first time that a Finance Commission has recommended **Rs 8,000 crore to states for incubation of new cities**, granting Rs 1,000 crore each for eight new cities.
- The focus of urban grants for million-plus cities is **improvement in air quality** and meeting the service level benchmark of solid waste management and sanitation.

5) Grants for health and setting up of disaster mitigation fund

- The commission recommended channelising the health grant of Rs 70,051 crore through local bodies, addressing the gaps in primary health infrastructure.
- The Commission's recommendation for setting up the state and national level **Disaster Risk Mitigation Fund (SDRMF),** in line with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act, is both well-timed and necessary.
- For the first time, the Finance Commission has introduced a 10-25 per cent **graded cost-sharing basis** by the states for the NDRF and NDMF which has not been appreciated by the states.

6) Non-lapsable fund for defence

- The Commission has recommended setting up of a dedicated non-lapsable fund, the Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS).
- Objective of the fund is to **bridge the gap between projected budgetary requirements and budget allocation** for defence and internal security and **to provide greater predictability** for enabling critical **defence capital expenditure.**
- The fund will have four specific sources: (a) **Transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India**, (b) disinvestment proceeds of DPSEs, (c) proceeds from the **monetisation of surplus defence land** and (d) proceeds of receipts from defence land likely to be transferred to state governments and for public projects in the future.
- The total indicative size of the proposed MFDIS over the period 2021-26 is Rs 2,38,354 crore.
- The Union government has accepted this recommendation in principle.

Conclusion

The report starts with the famous quote of Mahatma Gandhi: "The future depends on what we do in the present". It would be interesting to see the impact of these overarching and revolutionary recommendations in the times ahead.

2. Pollution from Coal Burning: IEACCC

Why in News

A study by the **International Energy Agency's Clean Coal Centre (IEACCC)** has stated that **coal burning** is responsible for heavy **air pollution** in India.

- Recently, a Delhi-based think tank **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** has also discussed the **measures to reduce carbon dioxide (CO_2)** footprints of India's coal-based power sector and **cautioned the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) against extending the deadline of meeting emission norms** for coal-based thermal power plants in the country.

Key Points

- **Findings:**
    - **Pollution from Coal-Based Thermal Power Stations:**
        - Coal-based thermal power stations contribute over half **sulphur dioxide (SO_2),** 30% **oxides of nitrogen (NOx),** about 20% **particulate matter (PM),** etc.
        - Persistent burning of coal in thermal power stations and a **delay in implementation of latest carbon capture storage technology** are among major reasons of air pollution in India.
    - **Pollution from Other Sectors:**
        - **Transport and other industrial sectors stand second** to coal-based thermal power stations as a contributor to air pollution.

- **Suggestions:**
    - **Retirement of Old Fleet of Power Stations:**
        - To limit pollution and improve the fleet efficiency by adopting clean coal technology.
    - **Investment in Cleaner and Advanced Technology:**
        - The most new advanced technology plants in India - such as **Mundra and Sassan in Gujarat** are struggling financially,

causing stakeholders to lose confidence in investing in cleaner and advanced technology.

- o **Launch More Ambitious Schemes:**
    - The current energy efficiency schemes, including **performance and achieve trade scheme**, efficiency standards scheme and carbon pricing schemes, are **not ambitious enough to drive significant improvement.**
- o **Adopting Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS):**
    - It is equally important to reduce emissions. It suggested India to include it as a part of its climate commitment.
    - CCUS is the **process of capturing waste CO_2, transporting it to a storage site** and depositing it where it will not enter the atmosphere.

Coal Burning and Pollution

- **Coal Formation:**
    - o Formed deep underground over thousands of years of heat and pressure, **coal is a carbon-rich black rock** that releases energy when burned.
- **Air Pollution:**
    - o When coal is burned, it releases a number of airborne toxins and pollutants.
    - o They include **mercury, lead, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulates,** and various other **heavy metals.**
    - o Health impacts can range from **asthma and breathing difficulties, to brain damage, heart problems, cancer, neurological disorders, and premature death.**
- **Water Pollution:**
    - o The coal-fired power plants **produce more than 100 million tons of coal ash** every year.
        - More than half of that waste ends up in **ponds, lakes, landfills, and other sites where, over time,** it can **contaminate waterways and drinking water supplies.**
    - o Other water impacts include **acid rock drainage** from coal mines, the destruction of mountain streams and valleys by mountaintop removal mining, and the energy-water collisions that occur when coal plants rely too heavily on local water supplies.
- **Climate Change:**
    - o Coal is a large contributor to **Global Warming.**
- **Initiatives to Control Emissions from Power Plants:**
    - o **Exploring CCUS:**

- India is exploring its potential, as a plant at the industrial port of Tamil Nadu's Tuticorin has begun **capturing CO_2 from its own coal-powered boiler and using it to make baking soda.**
  - o **Emission Standard:**
    - India has issued orders for **thermal power plants to comply with emissions standards for installing Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) units** that cut emissions of toxic sulphur dioxide.
  - o **Graded Action Plan:**
    - The Ministry of Power has proposed a **"graded action plan,"** whereby areas where plants are located would be graded according to the severity of pollution, with Region 1 referring to critically polluted areas, and Region 5 being the least polluted.

International Energy Agency's Clean Coal Centre

- **About:**
  - o It is a **technology collaboration programme,** organised under the **International Energy Agency.**
- **Members:**
  - o It has **17 members,** made up of **contracting parties and sponsoring organisations.**
  - o India's **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** is a sponsoring organisation.
- **Location:**
  - o Based in **London** with a team of engineers, scientists and other experts.
- **Support:**
  - o It is supported financially by **national governments** (contracting parties) and by **corporate industrial organisations.**
- **Mission:**
  - o To provide independent information and analysis on how coal can become a cleaner source of energy, compatible with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.**
  - o To **address the role of coal in the energy** trilemma and the need to balance security of supply, affordability and environmental issues.
  - o To **focus on reducing emissions of CO_2 and other pollutants** from coal use through **High Efficiency, Low Emissions (HELE) technologies.**

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

3. Farm laws must reflect regional and crop diversities

Argument against diversification

- In Punjab, Haryana and western UP, minimum support price (MSP)-based agriculture has a logic.
- Not all regions must diversify.
- The region has **great alluvial soil, good irrigation** and almost a century-long tradition of the application of science to agriculture.
- In **south Punjab, with less irrigation,** and parts of Haryana not covered by the Indira Gandhi Canal, some diversification to pulses, cotton etc. could work but the solid specialisation in this region remains.

Issue of middlemen

- Arhtiyas (middlemen) are important in Indian agricultural markets.
- They are **a part of the supply chain in north-west India**.
- Here they are not like the middlemen elsewhere.
- They function simply as **agents of the procurement agencies.**
- This was done by the past government **to reduce overhead costs of procurement.**

Steps need to be taken

- The e-markets, forwards and farmer-managed companies are not the dominant mode of rural organisations.
- Agriculture is the one good sector in otherwise dismal year.
- So, we need to strengthen it, not feed off on its glory, even outside north-west India.
- We have the **largest spread of agricultural markets** in the world according to spatial maps.
- But they are not APMCs.
- With weak markets (outside of grains) and **without first-stage processing and other infrastructure**, the farmer knows he is at the mercy of the trader and comes out on the streets when that is not understood.

Evolution of MSP

- The MSP played a crucial role in the days of **compulsory procurement and zonal restrictions.**

- Each crop had its own report then.
- Later separate reports were replaced by two reports, one for kharif and another one for rabi, apart from one for sugarcane (an annual crop).
- The 1982 rabi report stated that relative prices and, in that context, **MSP had the role of an intervention mechanism** when markets failed, outside the compulsory procurement area.
- Later, the concept of **transport costs and managerial costs** became important.

Way forward

- The Essential Commodities Act should be ditched.
- Good laws are good because progress starts with them, but not all laws are good everywhere.
- A **modified version of the laws** with a roadmap can be on the agenda — not everywhere, but most places outside the lands of the five rivers.

Conclusion

The amended laws should be considered in the context of regional variation in the country and necessary changes should be made to address the concerns of the farmers.

4. Arjun: Main Battle Tank MK-1A

PM has recently handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army.

Arjun Main Battle Tank

- The Arjun Main Battle Tank project was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.
- The objective was to create a "state-of-the-art tank with superior firepower, high mobility, and excellent protection".
- During the development, the CVRDE achieved breakthroughs in the engine, transmission, hydro-pneumatic suspension, hull and turret as well as the gun control system.
- Mass production began in 1996 at the Indian Ordnance Factory's production facility in Avadi, Tamil Nadu.

Features of the Arjun tank

- The Arjun tanks stand out for their 'Fin Stabilised Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS)' ammunition and 120-mm calibre rifled gun.
- It also has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with a stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions.
- The secondary weapons include a co-axial 7.62-mm machine gun for anti-personnel and a 12.7-mm machine gun for anti-aircraft and ground targets.

How is Mk-1A different?

- The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version.
- It is also supposed to have missile firing capability as per the design, but this feature will be added later as final testing of the capability is still on.
- However, the biggest achievement with the latest version is 54.3 per cent indigenous content against the 41 per cent in the earlier model.

5. Securities Appellate Tribunal

Why in News

Recently, the **Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT)** stayed the order passed by **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** that had put a one-year ban on a retail company Chairperson and some other promoters from the securities market.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - SAT is a **statutory body** established under the provisions of Section 15K of the **SEBI Act, 1992.**
- **Location:**
  - Mumbai.
- **Composition:**
  - SAT consists of a **Presiding Officer** and **Two other members.**
    - The Presiding officer of SAT shall be **appointed by the Central Government** in consultation with the **Chief Justice of India** or his nominee.
- **Powers:**
  - It has the **same powers as vested in a civil court.** Further, if any person feels aggrieved by SAT's decision or order can appeal to the **Supreme Court.**
- **Functions:**

- o To **hear and dispose of appeals against orders passed by the SEBI** or by an adjudicating officer under the SEBI Act,1992.
- o To hear and dispose of appeals against orders passed by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).**
- o To hear and dispose of appeals against orders passed by the **Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India (IRDAI).**

Securities and Exchange Board of India

- ▪ **About:**
  - o SEBI is a **statutory body** established in 1992 in accordance with the provisions of the **SEBI Act, 1992.**
  - o Initially, SEBI was a non-statutory body. In April, **1988 the SEBI was constituted as the regulator of capital markets** in India under a resolution of the Government of India.
    - The term **capital market** refers to facilities and institutional arrangements through which long-term funds, both debt and equity are raised and invested.
- ▪ **Headquarters:**
  - o The headquarters of SEBI is situated in **Mumbai.**
  - o The regional offices of SEBI are located in **Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai and Delhi.**
- ▪ **Composition:**
  - o All decisions taken by SEBI are collectively taken by its Board that consists of a **Chairman and eight other members.**
  - o SEBI also **appoints various committees**, whenever required to look into the pressing issues of that time.
- ▪ **Function:**
  - o To protect the interests of investors in securities and to **promote and regulate the securities market.**
    - **Securities** are **tradable financial instruments used to raise capital** in public and private markets.
    - There are primarily **three types of securities: equity**—which provides ownership rights to holders; **debt**—essentially loans repaid with periodic payments; and **hybrids**—which combine aspects of debt and equity.
  - o **Registering** and regulating the working of **stock brokers, merchant bankers, underwriters, portfolio managers, investment advisers** and such other intermediaries who may be associated with securities markets in any manner.
  - o SEBI is a **quasi-legislative, quasi-judicial and quasi-executive body.**
    - It can **draft regulations, conduct inquiries, pass rulings and impose penalties.**

Prelims Practice Questions

1. The "Traffic Crash Injuries And Disabilities: The Burden on India Society" report is released by?

A United Nations
B World Health organisation
C World Bank
D World Economic Forum

Answer : C

Explanation

- Recently, the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways released the **World Bank** Report titled **"Traffic Crash Injuries And Disabilities: The Burden on India Society". Hence, option C is correct.**
  - The Report has been prepared in collaboration with the NGO-Save Life Foundation.
  - The survey data was collected from four Indian states i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

2. Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary is located in:

   a. Gujarat
   b. Odisha
   c. Andaman and Nicobar Islands
   d. West Bengal

Answer: c
Explanation:
Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

3. Consider the following statements with respect to Bhashan Char Island:

   1. Bhashan Char Island is located in the Bay of Bengal.
   2. The Island was formed by Himalayan silt.

3. Myanmar has built a relocation camp for the Rohingyas at the Bhashan Char Islands.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

a. 1 and 2 only
b. 2 and 3 only
c. 3 only
d. 1 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Bhashan Char Island is located in the Bay of Bengal.
- The Island was formed by Himalayan silt.
- Bangladesh has built a relocation camp for the Rohingyas at the Bhashan Char Islands.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Giant Leatherback turtle:

1. It is the largest of all living turtles.
2. Most of these turtles are found in the Arctic and the Antarctic.
3. They are also listed in Schedule II of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

a. 1 and 2 only
b. 1 only
c. 2 and 3 only
d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Giant Leatherback turtle is the largest of all living turtles.
- They are listed in Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, according it the highest legal protection.
- The most long-ranging, Leatherbacks are found in all oceans except the Arctic and the Antarctic.

- It is the only living species in the genus Dermochelys and family Dermochelyidae.

5) Which of the following statements are correct with respect to *Digital Services Tax (DST)*

1. It is a 5% tax that India has charged on digital services revenues of a company generated from across globe.
2. It is applicable only to non-resident digital companies.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

Digital Services Tax (DST)

- It is a 2% tax that India has charged since April 2020 on revenues from digital services.
- It is applicable only to non-resident companies.
- The digital services offered in India, including digital platform services, digital content sales, and digital sales of a company's own goods, data-related services, software-as-a-service, and several other categories of digital services.
- It is aimed at ensuring that non-resident, digital service providers pay their fair share of tax on revenues generated in the Indian digital market.
- Ministry of Commerce & Industry clarifies that there is no retrospective element as the levy was enacted before the first day of April, 2020, which is the effective date of the levy.
- The DST does not have extra-territorial application as it applies only on the revenue generated from India.

6. Which of the following organization has developed India's Instant messaging app Sandes?

- a. Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In)

- b. Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)
- c. National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO)
- d. National Informatics Centre (NIC)

Answer : d

Sandes

- National Informatics Centre has launched an instant messaging platform called Sandes on the lines of WhatsApp.
- It can be used for all kinds of communications by anyone with a mobile number or email id.
- Open initially only to government officers, it has now been released for the common public as well.
- In the app there is no option to transfer the chat history between two platforms, the chats on government instant messaging systems or GIMS can be backed up to a users' email.
- GIMS, like other instant messaging apps in the market, uses a valid mobile number or email id to register the user for the first time.
- Further, as an additional safety feature, it allows a user to mark a message as confidential, which, the app's description says, will allow the recipient to be made aware the message should not be shared with others.
- The confidential tag, however, does not change the way the message is sent from one user to another.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss different types of cybercrimes and measures required to be taken to fight the menace.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing what do you mean by cybercrimes.
- Discuss various types of Cybercrimes and measures required to tackle them.
- Conclude suitably.

2. How far do you think cooperation, competition and confrontation have shaped the nature of federation in India? Cite some recent examples to validate your answer.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing the idea of federalism.
- Discuss some recent examples that showcase the features of cooperative, competitive, and confrontational federalism in India.
- Conclude suitably.