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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Bharat Bangla Maitri Bridge

Why in News

Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated **Bharat Bangla Maitri Bridge** in Tripura's South district.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - The bridge '**Maitri Setu**' has been built over the **Feni river** which flows between Indian boundary in Tripura State and Bangladesh.
    - Feni originates in the **South Tripura district**. The river passes through Sabroom town on the Indian side, and **meets the Bay of Bengal** after it flows into Bangladesh.
  - The **1.9 Km** long bridge joins **Sabroom (in Tripura) with Ramgarh (in Bangladesh)**.
  - The name '**Maitri Setu**' **symbolises growing bilateral relations** and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.
- **Constructed by and Cost:**
  - The construction was taken up by the **National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd** at a project cost of **Rs. 133 crore**.
    - The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited is a **fully owned company of the Government of India**.
    - It is responsible for **development & maintenance of National Highways & Strategic Roads** of India.
- **Significance:**
  - Now **Agartala** (capital of Tripura) **will become the nearest city to an international sea port** in India.
  - Tripura will become the '**Gateway of North East**' with **access to Chittagong Port** of Bangladesh, which is just 80 km from Sabroom.
    - Bangladesh and India have a long standing and time-tested **Protocol on Transit and Trade** through inland waterways.

- It would serve as a **new trade corridor** between the two countries, helping the **Northeast states grow**. It will **enhance people-to-people contact**.

## 2. Kerala HC restrains Centre on IT rules

### Context:

- Online legal news portal challenges the new IT regulations.

### Background:

- The government recently notified the **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** regulating digital news media, curated content (OTT platforms), and social media intermediaries.

### Details:

- The Kerala High Court has restrained the Centre from taking coercive action against Live Law Media Private Ltd., which owns a legal news portal, for not complying with the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

### Petitioner's stand:

#### Excessive regulation:

- The petition claims that Part III of the rules imposing a three-tier complaint and adjudication structure on publishers would make it virtually impossible for small or medium-sized publishers to function.
- The petition also claims that the creation of a grievance redressal mechanism, through a governmental oversight body amounted to excessive regulation.

#### Against constitutional rights:

- Rule 4(2), which makes it mandatory for every social media intermediary to enable tracing of originators of information on its platform violates **Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression)**.
- The rules obligating messaging intermediaries to alter their infrastructure to "fingerprint" each message on a mass scale for every user to trace the first originator were violative of the **fundamental right to privacy** of Internet users.

### 3. U.S. Defense Secretary to visit India

- **American Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will be soon visiting India as part of his maiden visit abroad.** The Secretary will also visit Japan and South Korea and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii. The planned visit would help reinforce the U.S.'s commitment to the Indo-Pacific.
- Cooperation, regional security challenges are expected to be discussed. Issues surrounding the **deepening of the U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership** and advancing cooperation between the countries for a free, prosperous and open Indo-Pacific and Western Indian Ocean Region are high on the agenda.
  - India and the U.S. have witnessed a deepening of their security partnership. **Growing Chinese assertiveness has also brought them closer in terms of security cooperation.**

### 4. Indo-Pacific is key priority: White House

#### Context:

- The first-ever **Quad leaders' summit-level meeting** under the Biden administration.

#### Details:

- The planned meeting would be a virtual meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan.
- A range of issues is likely to be discussed, including **COVID-19, economic cooperation and the climate crisis.**

#### Significance:

#### Reiterating U.S.'s commitment to Indo-pacific and the Quad:

- This would be one of President Biden's earliest multilateral engagements. The early scheduling of the Quad summit signifies the group's importance for the Biden administration and also the importance the administration places on the Indo-Pacific.
- It signals the **U.S.'s commitment to the Indo-Pacific.** It portrays the U.S intent to deepen its engagement with the Quad nations.

#### Scope for cooperation and collaboration:

- The Quad carries the potential for the member nations to pool their capabilities and build habits of cooperation to address some of the common interests, with **maritime security** being the foremost.

### The China angle:

- Despite labelling China as its biggest competitor, the Biden administration has been careful to not portray the Quad as being China focussed. However, the Quad provides a unique platform to **counter the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese in the Indo-Pacific**.

### 5. CISF celebrates its 52nd Raising Day in Ghaziabad

- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) celebrated its 52nd Raising Day at Ghaziabad.
- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is a **Central Armed Police Force in India** and is governed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It was set up under an Act of the Parliament of India.
- The CISF provides **security cover to industrial units, government infrastructure projects and facilities** and establishments located all over India. Industrial sectors like atomic power plants, space installations, mines, oil fields and refineries, major ports, heavy engineering, steel plants, barrages, fertiliser units, airports and hydroelectric/thermal power plants owned and controlled by Central Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), and currency note presses producing Indian currency are protected by CISF.

### 6. Diagnosing gestational diabetes

#### Context:

- The article discusses the concerns associated with gestational diabetes and makes relevant recommendations in this direction.

#### Gestational diabetes:

- **Pregnancy is a diabetogenic stress** and as a consequence, some **women develop a transitory form of diabetes during pregnancy called gestational diabetes**.
- Women of Indian (South Asian) origin are considered to be at the highest risk of gestational diabetes.
  - The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates that up to 25% of pregnancies in South Asia may be affected by hyperglycemia in

pregnancy. In India, it varies from about 10% in rural areas to about 30% in urban areas. **About 27 lakh to 30 lakh women develop gestational diabetes each year.**

### Concerns:

#### Impact on health of mother and child:

- Gestational diabetes is associated with a significantly increased **risk of complications during pregnancy** such as preeclampsia (fits during pregnancy), postpartum haemorrhage and sepsis, stillbirths, premature delivery, increased risk of neonatal deaths due to respiratory distress, neonatal hypoglycaemia and birth injuries.
- All these conditions contribute to **high maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.**
- **Children born to women with gestational diabetes are also at very high risk of obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.**

#### Impact on health of women post-pregnancy:

- If a woman gets gestational diabetes, it **increases the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases in such women.**
- Almost half the women with gestational diabetes go on to develop Type 2 diabetes within 10 years without preventive care.
  - Diabetes is a major public health problem in India with an estimated 7 crore adults with diabetes. Diabetes has a detrimental impact on our health system, economic productivity and the individual's life and family.

#### Lack of awareness:

- Despite the significant health threat posed by gestational diabetes, there is a lack of public awareness about gestational diabetes as well as low awareness and capacity within the health systems for testing and providing care.
  - Around 3.5 crore adults in India suffer from prediabetes and remain **undiagnosed till late complications set in.**

## 7. What does Biden's peace plan mean for Afghanistan?

### Context:

- The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace plan to the Afghan government and the Taliban.

### Background:

#### U.S.-Taliban deal:

- According to the agreement signed between the U.S. and the Taliban in February 2020, **American troops are set to leave Afghanistan by May 1.**
- The Taliban and the Afghan government started **peace talks in Doha** in September last year but reached no breakthrough. Violence has continued unabated.
  - The talks are aimed at reaching a consensus on Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements with the formation of a **new "inclusive government"** and **"permanent and comprehensive ceasefire"** being the top agenda.

### Details:

#### American proposal:

- The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has proposed a **UN-led conference of representatives** of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan. Mr. Blinken has also proposed a senior-level meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey.
- The U.S. would try to accelerate the ongoing talks between the Afghan leadership and the Taliban by **sharing written proposals through the U.S.'s special envoy for Afghanistan.**
- The U.S. administration has made a **renewed push for an interim unity government.**
  - As per the Biden administration's own assessment, the Taliban are on the ascent. The new administration believes that the best way to prevent a complete Taliban takeover is a regional peace process and an interim unity government.

#### The Afghanistan government's stand:



- The Afghanistan administration has consistently been critical of the U.S.'s direct outreach to the Taliban and making concessions to the Taliban.
- It has been vocal about the right of the elected representatives as being the only legitimate representatives of the Afghan people in making decisions related to Afghanistan. The administration has reiterated its opposition to any transfer of power except through elections.

### Concerns:

#### Worsen security situation:

- If American troops are pulled out of Afghanistan, it is very likely that the security situation will worsen and that the **Taliban could make rapid territorial gains.**

#### Ascent of the Taliban:

- Despite the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban, it seems to have very less options.
- If the Afghan government rejects the American offer, the war will continue. The withdrawal of the U.S. troops will place the Afghan government in a tough spot. If the government accepts the proposal, it will have to share power with the Taliban and discuss amendments to the Constitution and the future governance framework. **Either way, the Taliban are set to make gains.**

## 8. Modi to flag off Dandi March in Ahmedabad

- The Salt March, also known as the Salt Satyagraha, Dandi March and the Dandi Satyagraha, was an act of **nonviolent civil disobedience** in colonial India led by Mahatma Gandhi.
- The twenty-four-day march lasted between March and April in 1930.
- The march spanned almost 240 miles from **Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi.**
- It marked a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the **British salt monopoly.**

### Salt Satyagraha

- The Salt Satyagraha was a mass civil disobedience movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi against the salt tax imposed by the British government in India. He led a large group of people from Sabarmati Ashram on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930 till Dandi, a coastal village in Gujarat, to break the salt law by producing salt from seawater.



## Background to Salt Satyagraha

- By 1930, the Congress Party had declared that Poorna Swarajya or complete independence was to be the sole aim of the freedom struggle.
- It started observing 26 January as Poorna Swarajya Day, and it was decided that civil disobedience was to be the means employed to achieve it.
- Mahatma Gandhi was asked to plan and organise the first such act. Gandhiji chose to break the salt tax in defiance of the government.
- Some members of Congress were skeptical of the choice and other Indians and the British dismissed this choice of salt with disdain.
- The then Viceroy, Lord Irwin was hardly perturbed by the threat of a salt protest and the government did nothing to prevent the salt march from taking place.
- But Gandhiji's choice of using salt was nothing short of brilliant because it touched a chord with every Indian.
- It was a commodity required by all and the poor people were hurt because of the salt tax.
- Indians had been making salt from seawater free of cost until the passing of the 1882 Salt Act that gave the British monopoly over the production of salt and authority to impose a salt tax. It was a criminal offence to violate the salt act.
- Gandhiji also hoped to unite Hindus and Muslims as the cause was common to both groups.
- The salt tax accounted for 8.2% of the British Raj revenue from tax and Gandhiji knew that the government could not ignore this.

## GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

### 9. Regulation redux

#### Context:

- The Supreme Court's notice to the Centre on a public interest plea to **set up a national environmental regulator under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.**

#### Concerns:

#### Government's reluctance to set up a national environmental regulator:

- Successive governments have preferred to ignore the Supreme Court's observations on the need for a national environmental regulator.
- In 2011 and 2014, the Centre had rebuffed the apex court on the question of forming an independent regulator, contending that its orders in the **Lafarge mining case** were only in the nature of a suggestion.

#### **Ease of doing business over environmental conservation:**

- The current official policy seems to privilege ease of doing business over environmental conservation.
  - The environmental clearances under forest, wildlife, air and water quality laws seem to be heavily weighted in favour of promoters.
  - Prominent environmentalists have pointed out major concerns with respect to the **draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020**.
    - The 2020 notification **reduces civil society's role in the EIA process**. It does not encourage the public to voice its views and report violations. The EIA seems to overlook the views of communities that would be displaced, and are ill-equipped to assess the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services such as clean air, water and farm productivity.
    - The EIA process even as per the 2006 notification has been critiqued for neglecting the **inherent conflict of interest** in its provisions given that the proponent of a project is itself responsible for producing the EIA report.
    - There are serious questions being raised over the credibility of the EIA process, given the increasing instances of the EIA report being produced with the help of **dubious expertise and manipulated data**.

#### **Concerns with respect to regulations:**

- The **laggardly pace** at which the multiple departments process project proposals have not only resulted in the **raising of transaction costs** but also created a sense of uncertainty among the investors. This has aided in the clamour to dispense with regulation.

#### **Conclusion:**

- The government must **recognise the limits to extractive growth** and work towards preserving the integrity of the environment. India cannot afford to degrade its forests, rivers, wetlands and air, whose health is vital for its large population.

- The Centre and States must **acknowledge the conflict between the need for economic growth and environmental conservation.**
- **Administrative reforms** can aid in sustainable environment management and the setting up of a **neutral national environmental regulator** could be the first step in this direction.

## 10. A case for a revamped, need-based PDS

### Context:

- The recent Economic Survey has flagged the issue of **the growing food subsidy bill in India.** As per the government's own admission the food subsidy bill is increasingly becoming unmanageably large.

### Background:

#### National Food Security Act:

- The National Food Security Act (NFSA) came into force in July 2013.
- It extended **entitlements of food grains to almost two-thirds of the country's population.**
- The law requires the authorities to provide to **each beneficiary 5 kg of rice or wheat per month.**

### Details:

- The withdrawal of food grains by States from the central pool under various schemes has increased over the years.
- During the last three years, the quantity of food grains annually drawn by States has hovered around 60 million tonnes to 66 million tonnes. However, by December 2020, the Centre set apart 94.35 million tonnes to the States under different schemes including the NFSA and additional allocation, meant for distribution among the poor free of cost.

### Concerns:

#### Rising food subsidy:

- Food subsidy has been on a perpetual growth trajectory.
  - During 2016-17 to 2019-20, the subsidy amount, clubbed with loans taken by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) under the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) towards food subsidy, was in the range of Rs.

1.65-lakh crore to Rs. 2.2-lakh crore. **In future, the annual subsidy bill of the Centre is expected to be about Rs. 2.5-lakh crore.**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has further expanded this with the revised estimate of the food subsidy pegged at about ₹23-lakh crore, excluding the extra-budgetary resource allocation of ₹84,636 crore.

#### Issue prices:

- Though the NFSA in 2013, envisaged a price revision after three years, **the Central Issue Price (CIP) has remained at Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice for years now.**

#### Political compulsions:

- It would be extremely difficult to reduce the economic cost of food management in view of rising commitment towards food security and **the government's reluctance to not disturb the NFSA norms or increase the prices owing to political compulsions.**

#### Financial viability:

- The insistence of **keeping the retail prices of food grains at fair price shops at the present low levels**, even after the passage of nearly 50 years and achieving substantial poverty reduction in the country goes against the financial sustainability of the system.
  - As per the **Rangarajan group's estimate in 2014, the share of people living below the poverty line (BPL) in the 2011 population was 29.5% (about 36 crore).**
- The mere increase in the CIPs of rice and wheat without a corresponding rise in the issue prices by the State governments would only increase the burden of States, which are already reeling under financial stress.

#### Way forward:

- PDS is a **useful tool to counter the challenge of extreme poverty and hunger** and hence the dismantling of it is not a solution.
- Also, given the fact that the PDS system **helps support the farmers through government procurement of their produce**, it might not be advisable to replace the in-kind provision of food subsidy of the PDS system with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- The Centre should have a **relook at the overall food subsidy system.**

#### Revising NFSA coverage:

- The centre should revisit NFSA norms and coverage. The government **could look at decreasing the quantum of coverage under the law, from the present 67% to around 40%.**
- For all ration cardholders drawing food grains, a “give-up” option, as done in the case of cooking gas cylinders, can be made available.
- Though the States have been allowed to frame criteria for the identification of PHH cardholders, the Centre can play a critical role in nudging the states into pruning the number of beneficiaries under the NFSA system.

#### **Relook at the pricing mechanism:**

- With respect to the pricing mechanism, **the existing arrangement of flat rates should be replaced with a slab system.** Leaving the poor and needy sections, other beneficiaries can be made to pay a little more for a higher quantum of food grains.

#### **Conclusion:**

- A revamped, need-based PDS is required not just for **cutting down the subsidy bill** but also for reducing the scope for leakages. There should be a political will to take the necessary steps.

#### **Additional information:**

- Diversion of food grains and subsidy leakage is another serious cause of concern.
- Reforms implemented in the PDS through various steps, including end-to-end computerisation of operations, digitisation of data of ration cardholders, seeding of Aadhaar, and automation of fair price shops have helped address this concern to an extent.

### **11. National Employability Through Apprenticeship Program**

#### **Why in News**

The **National Employability Through Apprenticeship Program (NETAP)** has released its latest edition of the **Apprenticeship Outlook Report** for 2021 (January-June 2021).

- **Apprenticeship is a Skill Training program** wherein a person is engaged by a company as an apprentice and gains classroom (theory) learning for a short period, followed by on-the-job (practical) training.

#### **Key Points**

- **About the National Employability through Apprenticeship Program:**
  - It was set up in 2014 as a 100% employer-funded **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)**.
  - The program was launched by the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship** and TeamLease Skills University (Gujarat).
  - It is in accordance with the **National Employability Enhancement Mission** of the **AICTE**.
  - NETAP was structured to **overcome the challenges of the Apprenticeship Act, 1961**.
    - NETAP **proposed to appoint 2 lac apprentices every year** for the next 10 years. At peak capacity, it will be the world's largest apprenticeship program.
  - It will help the unemployed youth to build skills through **Learning by doing and Learning while earning** along with providing them with access to practical skills.

### **National Employability Enhancement Mission**

- It is a pioneering initiative taken **jointly by AICTE and Government of India**.
- Introduced in **2013**, the NEEM aims to **offer practical trainings to enhance employability** of any person who:
  - Is either pursuing graduation/ diploma in any technical or non-technical stream, or
  - Have discontinued studies of degree or diploma courses.
- A NEEM Trainee is any registered person who has a **minimum education up to Class X** and is **between 16 to 40 years** of age.
- A total of **23 industries** have been listed in the NEEM where a trainee can be enrolled. It includes the automobile industry, pharmaceuticals, electronics & hardware, food processing, healthcare services and the financial sector.
- The NEEM is envisioned to place at least 10,000 students per year in registered companies or registered industries for the purpose of providing training.
- **Key Findings of the Apprenticeship Outlook Report:**
  - **India's Apprenticeship Ecosystem:** Some 41% of the employers in India are keen on hiring apprentices while 58% of enterprises want to increase the quantum of their apprenticeship hiring this year.
  - **Leading Cities:** **Chennai** has emerged as the most apprentice friendly city.
    - Among non-metro cities, **Ahmedabad and Nagpur** are the most promising cities for apprenticeship.



- **Leading Sectors:** The manufacturing, automobiles and ancillaries, and retail are the leading sectors.
- **Positive Trend for Hiring Women Apprentices:** Overall the preference for women apprentices has increased by 10% from the previous half year.
  - This trend was more visible in **Bengaluru, Mumbai and Kolkata.**
- **Significance:**
  - **India's working-age population is estimated to continue to increase through 2041.** This will have major implications on the required rate of job creation in the economy.
  - Statistics show that **approximately 3% of children dropout after grade 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in the country** owing to socio-economic challenges. Apprenticeship can be an important mechanism for seamless transitioning from school to work and bridging of skill-gap in the workforce.
- **Other Initiatives to Promote Apprenticeships:**
  - Apprenticeship Act of 1961 (and the Amendments to the Act).
  - **Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS)**
  - National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)
  - **Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement Scheme**
  - **YuWaah Youth Skilling Initiative**
  - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana**



**GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations**

**1. King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award**

**Why in News**

The **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** received the prestigious International “**King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award**” conferred by the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, Rome.

- The award was announced on the eve of **World Soil Day - 2020 (5<sup>th</sup> December 2020)** in view of the **ICAR’s excellent contributions in “Soil Health Awareness”** on the theme “**Stop soil erosion, save our future**” (2019 theme).

**Key Points**

- **About King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award:**
  - Launched in 2018, the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award **acknowledges individuals or institutions that raise public awareness of soils** by organising successful and influential World Soil Day celebrations.
  - The award, **sponsored by the Kingdom of Thailand**, is named after **King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand** for his lifelong commitment to raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management and rehabilitation for food security, poverty alleviation and more.
  - The former winners of the Award include **Practical Action in Bangladesh in 2018** and the **Costa Rican Soil Science Society (AACS) in 2019**.
- **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR):**
  - It is an autonomous organisation under the **Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE)**, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
  - It was established on **16<sup>th</sup> July 1929** and was formerly known as the **Imperial Council of Agricultural Research**.
  - It is headquartered at **New Delhi**.
  - ICAR is the organisation responsible for the coordination, guidance and management of agricultural research and education in India.

- In this capacity, ICAR oversees one of the largest networks of **agricultural research and education institutes** in the world, covering the whole country in the fields of horticulture, soil science, fisheries and animal sciences among others.
- **Soil Degradation:**
  - Soil degradation is the **physical, chemical and biological decline in soil condition** caused by its **improper use or poor management**, usually for agricultural, industrial or urban purposes.
    - It can be the **loss of organic matter, decline in soil fertility**, and structural condition, **erosion, adverse changes in salinity, acidity or alkalinity**, and the effects of toxic chemicals, pollutants or excessive flooding.
  - The soil degradation is **caused by excessive pressure on land to meet the competing demands of the growing population** for food, fodder and fibre.
  - These processes, in turn, **reduce agricultural productivity leading to social insecurity**.
  - Emission of **greenhouse gases** to the atmosphere resulting in **climate change** and **global warming** could be the major reason for soil degradation.
  - Various human activities, such as the introduction of **large scale irrigation canals and faulty land use lead** to accelerated soil degradation through salinization, flooding, drought, erosion and waterlogging.
  - The other causes of degradation due to **direct/indirect human interventions** are:
    - Deforestation and removal of natural vegetation
    - Overgrazing
    - Agriculture-related activities
    - Over exploitation of the vegetation for domestic purpose

### Glinka World Soil Prize

- It is also conferred by FAO in line with soil. It is an annual award for dynamic change-makers dedicated to solving one of our world's most pressing environmental issues, i.e. **soil degradation**.
- It honours individuals and organizations whose leadership and activities have contributed, or are still contributing to the promotion of sustainable soil management and the protection of soil resources.

## 2. Kala-azar Elimination: Bihar to Miss Deadline

### Why in News

The new cases of **Kala-azar** or **Visceral Leishmaniasis** have been reported in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, casting **serious doubt** on the state government's efforts to **eradicate the disease in the state by 2022**.

- Bihar has already **missed the Kala-azar elimination target four times since 2010**.
- The first deadline was 2010, under the **National Health Programme**, followed by 2015. It was later extended to 2017 and 2020 due to the government's failure to eliminate Kala-azar.

### Key Points

- **Kala-azar or Leishmaniasis:**
  - Visceral leishmaniasis, also known as kala-azar, is characterized by **irregular bouts of fever, substantial weight loss, swelling of the spleen and liver, and anaemia**.
  - If the disease is not treated, the **fatality rate** in developing countries can be as high as **100% within 2 years**.
  - It is a **Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD)** affecting almost 100 countries including India.
    - NTDs are a diverse group of **communicable diseases** that prevail in **tropical and subtropical conditions** in 149 countries.
  - It is caused by a **parasite called Leishmania**, which is transmitted through the **bite of sand flies**.
  - There are three types of leishmaniasis:
    - **Visceral leishmaniasis**, which affects multiple organs and is the most serious form of the disease.
    - **Cutaneous leishmaniasis**, which causes skin sores and is the most common form.
    - **Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis**, which causes skin and mucosal lesions.
  - Visceral leishmaniasis, which is commonly known as Kala-azar in India, is fatal in over 95% of the cases, if left untreated.
- **Reasons for Missing the Deadline:**
  - **Lack Direction:** Elimination programmes lack direction and **Kala-azar returns year after year**.
  - **Widespread Poverty:** It was mostly the poor belonging to the **Dalits, Other Backward Communities and Muslims**, who were the main victims of the disease.

- **Trend of Decline:** However, there also has been a **trend of decline in the number of Kala-azar cases** in Bihar in the last few years.
  - There were **23,084 cases in 2010**, and by **2020, there were 2,712 cases**, according to official data.

### **National Kala-azar Elimination Programme**

- The National Health Policy-2002 set the goal of Kala-azar elimination in India by the year 2010 which was revised to 2015.
- Continuing focused activities with high political commitment, **India signed a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh and Nepal** to achieve Kala-azar elimination from the South-East Asia Region (SEAR).
- **Elimination** is defined as reducing the annual incidence of Kala-azar to **less than 1 case per 10,000 population** at the sub-district level in India.
- Presently all programmatic activities are being implemented through the **National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP)** which is an umbrella programme for prevention & control of vector borne diseases and is subsumed under **National Health Mission (NHM)**.

### **National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme**

- NVBDCP is the central nodal agency for prevention and control of six vector borne diseases i.e. **Malaria, Dengue, Lymphatic Filariasis, Kala-azar, Japanese Encephalitis and Chikungunya** in India.
- It works under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

## **3. Significance of India-Bangladesh Transport Connectivity: World Bank**

### **Why in News**

Recently, a **World Bank** report named “**Connecting to Thrive: Challenges and Opportunities of Transport Integration in Eastern South Asia**” stated that seamless **transport connectivity between India and Bangladesh** has the potential to increase national income by as much as 17% in Bangladesh and 8% in India.

- The report analyzes the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)**.

### **Key Points**

- **Issues:**
  - **Trade:**
    - Bilateral trade accounts for only about **10%** of Bangladesh's trade and a mere **1%** of India's trade.
      - In **East Asian and Sub-Saharan African economies**, intraregional trade accounts for **50% and 22%** of total trade, respectively.
    - **High tariffs, para-tariffs, and nontariff barriers** also serve as major trade barriers. Simple average tariffs in Bangladesh and India are more than twice the world average.
  - **Difficulty in Crossing Border:**
    - Weak transport integration makes the border between Bangladesh and India thick. Crossing the India-Bangladesh border at **Petrapole-Benapole**, the most important border post between the two countries, takes several days.
      - In contrast, the time to cross borders handling similar volumes of traffic in other regions of the world, including **East Africa, is less than six hours.** ★
  - **Isolated North-East:**
    - Indian trucks are not allowed to transit through Bangladesh. As a result, the northeast of India is particularly isolated with the rest of the country and connected only through the **27-km-wide Siliguri corridor**, also called the "**chicken's neck**". This leads to **long and costly routes.** ★
- **Benefits of Better Connectivity:**
  - **Increased Real Income:**
    - All districts in **Bangladesh** would benefit from integration, with the **eastern districts enjoying larger gains** in real income.
    - States bordering Bangladesh such as **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura in the northeast, and West Bengal** on the west, and states further away from Bangladesh such as **Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra** would also **gain huge economic benefits** from seamless connectivity.
  - **Increased Exports:**
    - Will yield a **297%** increase in Bangladesh's exports to India and a **172%** increase in India's exports to Bangladesh.
  - **Strategic Importance:**
    - Geographically, Bangladesh's location makes it a **strategic gateway to India, Nepal, Bhutan, and other East Asian countries**. Bangladesh can also become an **economic powerhouse** by improving regional trade, transit and logistics networks.
- **Important Recommendations:**

- **Strengthen the MVA:**
  - Harmonizing **driver's licensing and visa regimes**.
  - Establishing an **efficient regional transit** regime.
  - Rationalizing and **digitizing trade and transport** documents.
  - **Liberalizing** the selection of **trade routes**.
- **Improving Regional Connectivity:**
  - **Expand the effective capacity** of core transport and logistics infrastructure along regional corridors.
  - Ensure **competition in transport service** markets.
  - Deploy **modern information technology infrastructure** at land ports and seaports.
  - Develop **off-border custom clearance facilities** in Bangladesh and India.
- **Integration of Local Communities:**
  - Connecting local markets to regional corridors.
  - **Removing logistics bottlenecks** in export-oriented value chains.
  - Improving **women's participation in export-oriented agricultural value chains** at the macro, community, and household levels.

### **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement**

- **BBIN:**
  - The **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative** is a sub-regional architecture of countries in **Eastern South Asia**, a sub-region of South Asia.
  - The group meets through the official representation of member states to **formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements** across areas such as **water resources management, connectivity of power, transport, and infrastructure**.
- **MVA**
  - **About:**
    - It was signed on **15<sup>th</sup> June 2015** in Thimphu, Bhutan.
    - It seeks to facilitate the unrestricted cross-border movement of cargo, passenger, and personal vehicles between BBIN countries.
    - As per the agreement, **member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions**. Customs and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.
    - **Implementation of the MVA has been delayed** as the countries work to clarify some of the provisions that are supposed to be elaborated in protocols.



- **Objective:**
  - To provide **seamless people-to-people contact and enhance economic interaction by facilitating cross border movement of people and goods.**

## **GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment**

### **4. International Lunar Research Station: Russia and China**

#### **Why in News**

China and Russia have agreed to build a **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)**, possibly on the moon's surface, marking the start of a new era in space cooperation between the two countries.

- Russia is a part of **International Space Station** which is a **habitable artificial satellite** - the single largest man-made structure in low earth orbit.

#### **Key Points**

- **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS):**
  - **About:**
    - The ILRS is a comprehensive scientific experiment base with the capability of **long-term autonomous operation.**
    - The station would be **built on the lunar surface and/or on the lunar orbit** that would **carry out scientific research activities** such as the lunar exploration and utilization, lunar-based observation, basic scientific experiment and technical verification.
  - **Principle:**
    - Russia and China will adhere to the principle of **co-consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits.**
    - They will facilitate **extensive cooperation** in the ILRS, **open to all interested countries** and international partners.
  - **Significance:**
    - ILRS will strengthen scientific research exchanges, and promote humanity's exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.
- **Other Programmes Related to Moon:**
  - **NASA's Artemis:** Earlier, in 2020, **National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA)** published the outline for its **Artemis**



program, which plans to send the next man and first woman to the lunar surface by the year 2024.

- The Gateway is an outpost around the Moon to support human and scientific exploration in deep space.
- UAE's Rashid:
  - The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to send an unmanned spacecraft named Rashid to the moon in 2024.
- China's Chang'e-4 and Chang'e-5 Missions :
  - Chang'e-4 is the first probe ever to explore the far side of the moon by China.
  - Chang'e-5 mission will seek to collect lunar material to help scientists understand more about the moon's origins and formation.
- India's Similar Initiatives:
  - Chandrayaan-3:
    - India is working on Chandrayaan-3 which is successor to the Chandrayaan-2 mission and it will likely attempt another soft-landing on the lunar surface.
  - Space Station:
    - India has set its eye on building its own space station in low earth orbit to conduct microgravity experiments in space in 5 to 7 years.

## Moon

- Facts about Moon:
  - The Moon is Earth's only natural satellite and the fifth largest moon in the solar system.
  - The Moon's presence helps stabilize our planet's wobble, which helps stabilize our climate.
  - The Moon's distance from Earth is about 3,85,000 km.
  - The Moon has a very thin atmosphere called an exosphere.
  - The Moon's entire surface is cratered and pitted from impacts.
  - The Earth and Moon are tidally-locked. Their rotations are so in sync we only see one side of the Moon all the time.
- Reasons for Studying Moon:
  - Understanding Early Earth:
    - As it is made of remnants of Earth, clues about the composition of an early Earth could very well be hidden between layers of Moon dust.
    - Further, the Moon holds potential clues to how life began on Earth.
  - To Understand Seismic Activity on Earth :

- Studying **Moonquakes** can help us understand what seismic activity on Earth could have been like during times with less liquid water on the surface, such as during major ice ages or during the Earth's early history, when the surface was much too hot to preserve liquid oceans.
- **Composition of Earth's Atmosphere:**
  - By measuring **Earth's glow from the Moon**, scientists can accurately estimate how much Earth itself shines, and even the composition of Earth's atmosphere.
- **To Understand Tides, Seasons and Climate:**
  - Measuring the **mass, size and orbital properties of the Moon is essential for predicting** rhythms of **tides and seasons**.
  - Studying these **tidal and orbital interactions** between Earth and the Moon is extremely important for understanding possible **effects on Earth's climate**.

## 5. INS Karanj

### Why in News

Recently, Indian Navy's third stealth **Scorpene class** (of **Project-75**) Submarine **INS Karanj** has been commissioned at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai.

### Key Points

- **About:**
  - The **previous INS Karanj** (a Russian-origin submarine) was **commissioned in 1969**, at Riga in the erstwhile USSR. It had served the nation for **34 years up to 2003**.
  - The **new INS Karanj** would form part of the **Western Naval Command's Submarine fleet**.
  - The ship's name, Karanj, is believed to be derived from the **Karanja island** (also known as Uran Island), a town in Raigad district, which lies in the south-east of Mumbai Harbour.
    - The **Indian Navy has its base at Uran** near Navi Mumbai.
- **Project 75:**
  - It is a programme by the Indian Navy that entails **building six Scorpene Class** attack submarines.
  - It is given support by the **Department of Defence Production (Ministry of Defence)** and **Indian Navy** throughout its various phases of construction.

- The **Mazagon Dock limited (MDL)** is manufacturing six Scorpene submarines with **technology assistance from Naval Group of France** under a USD 3.75 bn deal signed in October 2005.
  - MDL is one of the **leading shipbuilding yards** and only submarine builder in India.
- **Other Submarines of the Ongoing Project-75:**
  - Two submarines, **Kalvari** and **Khanderi**, have been commissioned into the Indian Navy.
  - The fourth Scorpene, **Vela**, has commenced its sea trials.
  - The fifth Scorpene '**Vagir**' was launched in November 2020.
  - The sixth and last submarine, **Vagsheer**, is being readied for boot together.
- **Scorpene Class Submarines:**
  - The submarines in the Project-75 Scorpene Class are powered by **diesel-electric propulsion systems**.
  - Scorpene is one of the most **sophisticated submarines**, capable of undertaking **multifarious missions** including anti-surface ship warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying, and area surveillance.
  - Scorpene is a conventional powered submarine (diesel-electric) **weighing 1,500 tonnes** and can go up to **depths of 300m**.
  - The **Scorpene class is the Navy's first modern conventional submarine series in almost two decades** since INS Sindhushastra, procured from Russia in July 2000.
  - The Navy is **looking to install Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) modules** on all the Scorpene submarines to enhance endurance.

## Way Forward

- With the launch of Karanj, India further **cements its position as a Submarine Building Nation** and MDL has more than lived up to its reputation as Warship and Submarine Builders to the Nation. This is totally in sync with the current impetus of the Government towards **Make in India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

### Prelims Practice Questions

1. "Dustlik" is a military exercise between which of the following countries?

1. India
2. Uzbekistan
3. Afghanistan
4. Kazakhstan

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 1, 3 and 4 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. 1 and 3 only

Answer: c

#### Explanation:

The India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise is known as Dustlik. The first-ever exercise was held in 2019. Exercise Dustlik-II is being held between India and Uzbekistan from March 10-19, 2021.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Uighur Muslim is an indigenous minority community of China.
2. The largest population of Uighurs live in Xinjiang region of China.
3. The Xinjiang region of China shares borders with India and Pakistan only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : B

#### Explanation

- The **Uighurs** are a predominantly Muslim minority Turkic ethnic group, whose **origins can be traced to Central and East Asia**.
  - The Uighurs speak their own language, similar to Turkish, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.
  - The Uighurs are considered to be one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minority communities in China.
  - However, China recognises the community only as a regional minority and **rejects that they are an indigenous group. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- Currently, the **largest population of the Uighur ethnic community lives in Xinjiang** region of China. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
  - A significant population of Uighurs also lives in the neighbouring Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.
  - **Xinjiang** is technically an autonomous region within China – its largest region, rich in minerals, and sharing borders with **eight** countries, including **India, Pakistan, Russia, Mongolia** and **Afghanistan. Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

**3. Enabling the Business of Agriculture report is published by:**

- a. World Bank
- b. International Monetary Fund
- c. Food and Agriculture Organization
- d. International Institute of Agriculture

**Answer: a**

**Explanation**

Enabling the Business of Agriculture is a World Bank Group study collecting unique data on the regulations that affect farmers. Enabling the Business of Agriculture indicators assess whether governments make it easier or harder for farmers to operate their businesses.

**4. The area known as ‘West Bank’ sometimes appeared in the news in the context of the events related to:**

A Melting glaciers in Arctic

- B Israel-Middle East conflict
- C Volcanic eruptions at the coast of Peru
- D Major sea port of India in the medieval era

**Answer : B**

### **Explanation**

- **West Bank** (about one and a half times the size of Goa) is a landlocked territory in **West Asia**. It also contains a significant section of the western dead sea.
- It was captured by Jordan after the Arab-Israeli War (1948) but Israel snatched it back during the Six-Day War of 1967 and has occupied it ever since.
- At present, there are around 130 formal Israeli settlements along with 26 lakh Palestinians at West Bank. **Hence, option B is correct.**

**5. With reference to the Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA) scheme, which of the following is/are correct?**

1. This scheme was envisioned by APJ Abdul Kalam for empowering and accelerating rural development.
2. It was replaced by Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) in 2016.

Choose the correct answer from the codes given below.

- A 1 Only
- B 2 Only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer : C**

### **Explanation**

- Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA) was **mooted by the former President Dr. Abdul Kalam in January 2003** as a way of empowering and accelerating rural development.

- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) implemented the PURA scheme on a pilot basis in seven clusters for a period of three years (2004-05 to 2006-07). **Hence statement 1 is correct.**
- PURA 2.0 as a central sector scheme was launched in 2012 focussing on the development of potential growth centres such as census towns.
- It aims to provide livelihood opportunities and urban amenities to the rural population in order to improve their quality of life and bridge the urban-rural divide.
- The PURA framework has been devised as an empowerment-based model to achieve sustainability by providing the villages with the necessary Physical, Electronic, Knowledge and Economic Connectivity.
- In 2014-15, the government made no allocation to the PURA scheme and instead introduced the Rurban Mission with an initial allocation of Rs. 100 crore.
- The **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM)** scheme was **launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in 2016** to deliver integrated project based infrastructure in the rural areas, which will also include development of economic activities and skill development.
  - The aim of the Rurban Mission is to create 300 rural growth clusters across the country. **Hence statement 2 is correct.**

**6. With reference to deep web, consider the following statements:**

1. The deep web is part of the dark net which includes all unindexed sites.
2. Personal email and online banking are included in the deep web.

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

**Answer : B**

**Explanation**

- Darknet refers to the hidden internet platform **used for narcotics sale, exchange of pornographic content and other illegal activities** by using the secret alleys of the onion router (ToR- a free and open-source software for enabling anonymous communication) to stay away from the surveillance of law enforcement agencies.



- It is tough to crack because of its end-to-end encryption.
- **The dark net is part of the deep web, which encompasses all unindexed sites that don't pop up when an Internet search is done. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- However, not all activities associated with the deep web are nefarious like darknet. In most cases, these pages are not searchable because they are password-protected and require authorization in order to access them.
  - **Personal email, online banking, and other similar sites are included under the umbrella of the deep web. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**



## **Mains Practice Questions**

**1Q. Climate change, overexploitation, and policy measures have combinedly turned India into a water-stressed economy. Discuss.**

### **Approach**

- Start the answer by briefly discussing about the condition of water scarcity in India.
- Discuss the reasons for water stress in India.
- Suggest some measures to address the problem of water scarcity.
- Conclude Suitably.

**2Q. Discuss the advantages of river linking projects and its possible impact on the environment. (150 words)**

### **Approach**

- Introduce by explaining about the river interlinking project.
- Discuss advantages of the project.
- Enumerate possible impacts of the project on the environment.