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

**1. 'India known as first, reliable responder'**

**What's in News?**

External Affairs Minister said that in the past few years, India had developed a reputation of being the first and reliable responder in the region.

- He said that the Prime Minister's vision has provided an overarching framework to make the country's goodwill meaningful in terms of practical initiatives and activities.
- India had provided "Made in India" vaccines for COVID-19 to 72 countries.
- Medicines have been supplied to 150 nations, 82 of them as grants.
- India's Vaccine Maitri initiative has also been widely praised across the globe.
  - Human-centric global cooperation is the driving force of India's Vaccine Maitri initiative.
- In the recent past, India readily provided humanitarian assistance and disaster responses in Yemen and Nepal or Mozambique and Fiji.
- In critical negotiations of global importance like the Paris Agreement, India played a key bridging role.

**2. Quick, decisive steps required to curb 'second peak', says PM**

**Context:**

Warning of another possible nationwide COVID-19 outbreak, the Prime Minister urged the States and the Union Territories to work towards stopping the emerging second peak of infections and stressed the need for quick and decisive steps.

**Steps taken:**

- All States and Union Territories have been tagged to 10 national labs under the INSACOG consortium with the National Centre for Disease Control as the nodal institute.
- Directions have been given to ensure that the standard operating procedures issued by the Health Ministry for surveillance of international travellers and their contacts are implemented rigorously.

**Way Forward:**

- There is a need for provision of micro-containment zones.
- With the whole country opened up for travel, there has to be a robust mechanism for sharing information among States/Union Territories.

Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG):

- The government launched the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG), comprising 10 labs spread across India.
- INSACOG was launched to ascertain the status of new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the country.
- It would monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 on a regular basis through a multi-laboratory network.
- It has a high level Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee. Also, it has a Scientific Advisory Group for scientific and technical guidance.

### 3. Aligning a missile deal with destination Manila

**Context:**

- **India and the Philippines signing the “Implementing Arrangement” for “procurement of defense material and equipment procurement”.** This agreement lays the groundwork for sales of defence systems through the government-to-government route.
- Philippines is looking to buy the BrahMos cruise missile from India.

**Background:**

**BrahMos:**

- The BrahMos cruise missile is manufactured by BrahMos Aerospace Limited, a joint venture between India and Russia.
- It is the **first supersonic cruise missile to enter service**. It is capable of attaining a speed of Mach 2.8 (almost three times the speed of sound), it has a range of at least 290 km (The new version can reach up to 400km).
- The high speed would make it difficult for air defence systems utilising surface-to-air missiles to intercept the BrahMos while making it easier for the BrahMos to target and neutralise even advanced fighter jets.
- Efforts to increase the speed and range of the missile in its next iterations are under way, with a goal of achieving hypersonic speeds (at or above Mach 5) and a maximum range of 1,500 km.

**Significance of the deal:**

- The deal for BrahMos missile will be of great significance for multiple reasons.

### Export as a goal:

- The BrahMos is a highly desirable product for other countries to procure as well. Countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa have so far shown an interest in acquiring the BrahMos systems.
- Exporting of the system would **boost the credibility of India as a defence exporter and help it meet the target of \$5 billion in defence exports by 2025.**

### Geo-political impact:

- The export of the BrahMos would help **elevate India's stature as a regional superpower.**
- The export to the Philippines would caution China and act as a deterrent to Beijing's aggressive posturing in the Indo-pacific region.
- Other nations threatened by Chinese belligerence may come forward to induct the BrahMos into their arsenal, thereby **boosting India's economic, soft, and hard power profile in the region** and providing the Indo-Pacific with a strong and dependable anchor with which they can protect their sovereignty and territory.

### Challenges:

- Two major roadblocks still remain in the proposed deal.

### Threat of CAATSA sanctions:

- Given that the NPO Mashinostroyeniya is one of the listed Russian entities under the **S.'s Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)** the export of the BrahMos missile systems may attract sanctions. Hesitant of being sanctioned, countries may shy away from purchasing the BrahMos.

### Financing the systems:

- A regiment of the BrahMos, including a mobile command post, four missile-launcher vehicles, several missile carriers, and 90 missiles, reportedly costs around \$275.77 million (Rs. 2,000 crore). **The cost of the systems has been a major hurdle in moving forward to reach a deal with the Philippines.**
  - India has offered a \$100 million line of credit to the Philippines.

- Ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries which are interested in the BrahMos would find it difficult to purchase it.

### **Conclusion:**

- With India determined to develop itself as a hub of defence manufacturing, how it handles the sale of the BrahMos would be an important factor in its potential emergence as a net provider of regional security in the Indo-Pacific.

## **4. 'No decision on national NRIC till now'**

### **What's in News?**

The Union government informed the Rajya Sabha that it had not taken any decision to prepare the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) at the national level till now.

### **National Register of Indian Citizens:**

- NRIC is a list of all the legal citizens of the country, with necessary documents.
- Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 provides for compulsory registration of every citizen of India and maintenance of NRIC.
- The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 spells out the rules for operationalizing the idea of registering all citizens and issuing national identity cards to them.

### **Note:**

- Earlier, following the Supreme Court's order, the Government conducted the National register of Citizens updating exercise in Assam.

## **5. Serious issue if 3 cr. ration cards were cancelled, says SC**

### **Context:**

The Supreme Court said it was a very serious matter if the Centre had really cancelled around three crore ration cards.

### **Background:**

- A petition was filed alleging that the cancellation of ration cards solely because they could not be biometrically linked with Aadhaar led to starvation deaths across the country.

- It was pointed out that the ration cards of tribal people and the poor were cancelled.

#### Details:

- According to the Union of India, the insistence on Aadhaar and biometric authentication had led to the cancellation of nearly four crore ration cards in the country.
- The Union of India casually gives an explanation that these cancelled cards were bogus.
- However, the petition points out that the real reason was technological system based on iris identification, thumb prints, non-possession of Aadhaar, non-functioning of the Internet in rural and remote areas, etc., led to largescale cancellation of ration cards, without notice to the family concerned.
- While the states were in a denial mode, blaming the deaths on diarrhoea and malaria, the petition blamed lack of food and starvation for deaths.

#### Issue:

- Even as the government highlighted the redressal mechanism within the Food Security Act as the right place to go, none of the States have appointed independent nodal officers or district grievance redressal officer under the Act.
- All the States have granted additional designations to existing officers. In many cases, the officers given additional designations are from the Food Supply Department leading to a conflict of interest.
- The Hunger Watch Report of the Right to Food Campaign in 2020 characterised the hunger situation in India as “grave”.
- India ranks 94 out of 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2020 and is in the ‘Serious Hunger Category’.

#### Way Forward:

- Right to food, which the ration card symbolised, cannot be curbed or cancelled because of lack of Aadhaar.
- The Supreme Court in the Swaraj Abhiyan cases on the implementation of the Food Security Act, had given a slew of directions which included social audits, framing of rules and setting up vigilance committees. These directions must be diligently adhered to.

#### 6. ‘Frame rules for amicus curiae’

#### What’s in News?

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta made a strong appeal to the Supreme Court to frame guidelines for lawyers appointed as the court's amici curiae in various cases, especially sensitive ones.

- It was pointed out that the court-appointed amici curiae tended to even interfere in the running of organisations such as the CBI.
- He submitted that it is time the court frame guidelines to demarcate the role of an amicus curiae.

#### **Amicus Curiae:**

- An amicus curiae literally translates to “friend of the court”.
- An amicus curiae is someone who is not a party to a case who assists a court by offering information, expertise, or insight that has a bearing on the issues in the case.
- The decision on whether to consider an amicus brief lies within the discretion of the court.

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

### **7. Re-evaluating inflation targeting**

#### **Context:**

- March 31<sup>st</sup> will mark the end of the term of **monetary policy framework agreement between the Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on inflation targeting.**
- The given article evaluates the effectiveness of the monetary policy.

#### **Background:**

#### **Inflation targeting:**

- Inflation control is a legitimate objective of economic policy given the correlation between inflation and macro-economic stability.
- Inflation targeting is one of the many inflation control policies.
- Unlike the money-supply targeting policy of inflation control, **inflation targeting method prescribes the use of the interest rate to target inflation.** Given that the policy interest rate, is under the direct control of the central bank, this method is believed to be more effective than the monetarist approach.

### Details:

- Though the **inflation rate has remained within the prescribed band of 2% to 6%** since 2016 and the RBI has succeeded in anchoring inflationary expectations, the **available evidence and observed trends are not conclusive on the efficacy claimed for inflation targeting.**

### Logical vulnerabilities in the assumed model:

- The economic model that underlies inflation targeting revolves around the proposition that inflation reflects “overheating”, or economic activity at a level greater than the “natural” level of output, having been taken there by central banks that have kept interest rates too low, at a level lower than the “natural” rate of interest. This necessitates the need to raise the **rate of interest (‘repo’ rate)** to control inflation.
- Inflation in India entered the prescribed band of 2% to 6% two years before inflation targeting was adopted in 2016-17. In fact, inflation had fallen steadily since 2011-12, halving by 2015-16. This by itself suggests that there is a mechanism driving inflation other than what is imagined in inflation targeting.
- The decline in inflation has been mainly led by the relative price of food. **The vagaries of the price of food are a major determinant in inflation rate and the adopted model fails to acknowledge this aspect.**

### Impact of inflation targeting:

- Five variables namely growth, private investment, exports, non-performing assets (NPAs) of commercial banks, and employment would be analyzed here.
  - The economy’s trend rate of growth actually began to decline after 2010-11. This trend was observed despite falling inflation trend. It indicates that the **sharply falling inflation could do nothing to revive growth**, belying the proposition that low inflation is conducive to growth.
  - The swing in the real interest rate of over 5 percentage points in 2013-14 was powered further in 2016, when inflation targeting was adopted, and could have contributed to a declining private investment rate. This indicates that the **higher interest rates, the toolkit for inflation targeting, may have been harmful for private investment in the economy.**
  - Exports and employment rates have fared poorly since inflation targeting was adopted in 2016.



- It has long been recognised that a **central bank focusing on inflation may lose control of financial stability**. NPAs have grown since 2016, and the cases of IL&FS, PMC Bank, PNB and YES Bank are indicative of the poor management and malfeasance in the financial sector, given the excessive focus of the central bank on inflation targeting.

### Conclusion:

- Though Inflation control will always be relevant for macroeconomic stability, there is no conclusive evidence that the policy has worked in India as the presumed benefits of low inflation are yet to become evident.
- Infact **inflation targeting may end up raising interest rates to higher and higher levels which bring out many negative impacts** as discussed above, without lowering inflation.

## 8. New DFI must curb reliance on foreign funds, says K.V. Kamath

### Context:

The former New Development Bank president K.V. Kamath said that the new development finance institution (DFI) cleared by the Union Cabinet must be careful about preventing 'excessive reliance' on foreign funds.

- He stressed that even global development banks' soft loans were 'not really soft' and 'excessive reliance on international funds' would not be prudent.

### Background:

The Union Cabinet approved a Bill to set up a Development Finance Institution.

- The development finance institutions or development finance companies are organizations owned by the government or charitable institutions to provide funds for low-capital projects or where their borrowers are unable to get it from commercial lenders.
- As of December 2019, there were over 6,000 brownfield and greenfield projects requiring funding.
- The Budget 2021-22 had provided for an initial amount of ₹20,000 crore for the institution.

### Objectives of Development Finance Institutions

- The prime objective of DFI is the economic development of the country

- These banks provide financial as well as the technical support to various sectors
- DFIs do not accept deposits from people
- They raise funds by borrowing funds from governments and by selling their bonds to the general public
- It also provides a guarantee to banks on behalf of companies and subscriptions to shares, debentures, etc.
- Underwriting enables firms to raise funds from the public. Underwriting a financial institution guarantees to purchase a certain percentage of shares of a company that is issuing IPO if it is not subscribed by the Public.
- They also provide technical assistance like Project Report, Viability study, and consultancy services.

## 9. Looking beyond privatisation

### Context:

- The Union government has announced its **intent to privatise Public Sector Banks (PSBs)** in the recent Budget session.

### Details:

- The article argues against the proposed move to privatise Public Sector Banks based on the following arguments.

### Wrong notion:

- The failure of innumerable private banks around the world, challenge the notion that only private banks are efficient. The large **volumes of NPAs observed in private corporate entities** also challenge the notion of private enterprises being the epitome of efficiency.

### Positive role played by public banks:

- The **nationalisation of 14 private banks in 1969, followed by six more in 1980**, transformed the banking sector and ensured the following benefits.
  - Neglected areas like agriculture, poverty alleviation plans, rural development, health, education, exports, infrastructure, women's empowerment, small scale and medium industry, and small and micro industries, have witnessed **increased credit disbursement rates from the public sector banks.**
  - The nationalization of banks helped in promoting more **equitable regional growth.** The increased number of bank branches in rural areas

has reduced the poor people's dependence on moneylenders and thus helped **move out of the vicious cycle of poverty**.

- Bank nationalization **helped create jobs**. They also improved the working conditions of employees in the banking sector, as the state ensured higher wages, security of services, and other fringe benefits.
- As an institution, PSBs have been vehicles of the Indian economy's growth and development. They have also **contributed significantly to infrastructural development**.

#### **Threat posed by privatization of banks:**

- Placing the huge network of bank branches and the infrastructure and assets in the hands of private enterprises or corporates may turn out to be detrimental given the **risks of monopoly and cartelisation of the crucial financial sector** and this could lead to denial of economical banking services to the common man.

#### **Unfair criticism of Public sector banks:**

- It is unfair to blame PSBs alone for the alarming rise of NPAs.
- **Wilful default by large corporate borrowers and subsequent recovery haircuts and write-offs**, have put a big dent on the balance sheets of PSBs.
- The lack of strong recovery laws and lack of criminal action against wilful defaulters is a major lacuna in the system.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Stringent measures are required to recover large corporate stressed assets.
  - There is an urgent need to bring in a **suitable statutory framework to consider wilful defaults on bank loans a "criminal offence"**.
  - There should be a system to examine top executives of PSBs across the country which will help in **improving accountability among the top executives of the bank**.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Privatisation of PSBs is not a definitive panacea for the problems of the banking sector in India.

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS

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

#### 1. India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Women's Forum Meeting

##### Why in News

Recently, the **Sixth India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Women's Forum** meeting was held virtually.

- **India is the current chair** of IBSA Dialogue Forum.

##### Key Points

- **Highlights from the Meeting:**
  - Recalled that the Year 2020 marked-
    - **The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDFA):** The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action **flagged 12 key areas** where urgent action was needed to ensure greater equality and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. It also laid out concrete ways for countries to bring about change.
    - **The 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adoption of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development & Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): Goal 5** aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women in the public and private sphere.
    - **The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSC RESOLUTION 1325 on women, peace and security.**
    - **A Decade since UN WOMEN was established:** UN Women is the **United Nations (UN)** organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was established in 2010.
  - Lauded the efforts of Government of India in helping out other countries to overcome the challenges posed by **Covid-19** pandemic by providing vaccines, masks, sanitizers, PPE Kits etc.
- **India's Effort for Women Empowerment:**
  - **Equal rights for men and women** are enshrined under **Articles 14 to 16 in the Indian constitution.**

- It signed the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** in 1980 and ratified it in 1993 with some reservations.
- The **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** and the **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** have been enacted to criminalise instances of dowry and domestic violence.
- The government also **increased maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks** under the **Maternity Benefit Act** in 2017 for the private sector.
- The **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013** has been enacted covering all the women, in spite of their age and employment status, and protects them from **sexual harassment at workplaces**, in both the public and private sectors of the industry where the women are employed.
- Another milestone was reached when the **Supreme Court upended the government's position on women serving as army commanders in 2020**.
- **Efforts to pass the Women's Reservation Bill** which gives **33%** reservation for women seats in all levels of Indian politics.
- Flagship schemes to promote gender equality, including **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter), **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** (a scheme to provide gas connections to women from below the poverty line households) and **Mahila-E-Haat** (which uses technology to support female entrepreneurs).
  - While India has taken some measures on human development, its global standing on gender equality remains low. India's **ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report**, commissioned by the World Economic Forum, **declined from 108<sup>th</sup> in 2018 to 112<sup>th</sup> in 2020**.

### India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum

- **About:** The IBSA Dialogue Forum is a **tripartite grouping (India, Brazil, South Africa)** for promoting cooperation among these countries.
- **Formation:** The grouping was formalized and named the IBSA Dialogue Forum when the Foreign Ministers of the three countries met in Brasilia (Brazil) on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003 and issued the **Brasilia Declaration**.
- **Headquarters:** IBSA **does not have a headquarters or a permanent executive secretariat**. At the highest level, it **counts on the Summits of Heads of State and Government**.
  - So far Five IBSA Leadership Summits have been held. The 5<sup>th</sup> IBSA Summit was held in Pretoria (South Africa) in 2011. The **6<sup>th</sup> IBSA Summit is to be hosted by India**.

- **IBSA Fund for Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger**, established in 2004, is a unique Fund through which development projects are executed with IBSA funding in fellow developing countries.
  - Till date IBSA has supported 31 projects in 20 partner developing countries in the areas of safe drinking water, agriculture and livestock, solar energy, waste management, health etc., with the aim of contributing to the achievement of the SDGs (earlier MDGs).
  - The IBSA Fund has been the **recipient of several key recognitions** including the UN South-South Partnership Award in 2006 (for projects in Haiti and Guinea-Bissau), an MDG Award for South-South Cooperation in 2010 and the South-South Champions Award in 2012 recognizing the work of the three countries in using innovative approaches to share development experiences in other parts of the world.
- **Joint naval exercise IBSAMAR** (IBSA Maritime Exercise) is an important part of IBSA trilateral defence cooperation. Six editions of IBSAMAR have been held so far, the latest one being off the coast of South Africa in October, 2018.

## 2. UDAN 4.1

### Why in News

On the commencement of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (India@75)', the **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA)** has proposed about **392 routes under UDAN 4.1 bidding process**.

### Key Points

- **About UDAN 4.1:**
  - The UDAN 4.1 focuses on connecting smaller airports, along with special helicopter and seaplane routes.
  - Some new routes have been proposed under the **Sagarmala Seaplane services**
    - **Sagarmala Seaplane Services** is an ambitious project under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** with potential airline operators.
      - One such seaplane service is already in operation between Kevadia and Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, which was started in October 2020.
- **About UDAN Scheme:**
  - Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) was **launched as a regional connectivity scheme** under the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2016.

- It is an innovative scheme to **develop the regional Aviation market**.
- The objective of the scheme is to create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.
- The scheme envisages providing connectivity to un-served and underserved airports of the country through the revival of existing air-strips and airports. The scheme is **operational for a period of 10 years**.
  - Under-served airports are those which do not have more than one flight a day, while unserved airports are those where there are no operations.
- Financial incentives from the Centre, state governments and airport operators are extended to selected airlines to encourage operations from unserved and under-served airports, and keep airfares affordable.
- Till date, 325 routes and 56 airports including 5 heliports and 2 water aerodromes have been operationalised under the scheme.
- **UDAN 1.0:**
  - Under this phase, 5 airlines companies were awarded 128 flight routes to 70 airports (including 36 newly made operational airports).
- **UDAN 2.0:**
  - In 2018, the Ministry of Civil Aviation announced 73 underserved and unserved airports.
  - For the first time, helipads were also connected under phase 2 of the UDAN scheme.
- **UDAN 3.0:**
  - Inclusion of Tourism Routes under UDAN 3 in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism.
  - Inclusion of Seaplanes for connecting Water Aerodromes.
  - Bringing in a number of routes in the North-East Region under the ambit of UDAN.
- **UDAN 4.0:**
  - In 2020, 78 new routes were approved under the 4<sup>th</sup> round of Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) - UdeDeshKaAamNagrik (UDAN) to further enhance the connectivity to remote & regional areas of the country.
  - Kavaratti, Agatti, and Minicoy islands of Lakshadweep will be connected by the new routes of UDAN 4.0.

### 3. India's Act East Policy

#### Why in News

Recently, the Union Minister of State **Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)** said that connectivity is an important element of **Act East Policy**.

## Key Points

- **About:**
  - The 'Act East Policy' announced in **November, 2014** is the upgrade of the "Look East Policy".
  - It is a **diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations** with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.
  - It involves **intensive and continuous engagement with Southeast Asian countries** in the field of **connectivity, trade, culture, defence and people-to-people-contact** at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.
- **Aim:**
  - To **promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and developing a strategic relationship** with countries in **Indo-pacific region** with a proactive and pragmatic approach and thereby **improving the economic development of the North Eastern Region (NER)** which is a gateway to the South East Asia Region.

## Look East Policy

- In order to recover from the **loss of the strategic partner -USSR** (end of the Cold war 1991), India sought to build up a relationship with the USA and allies of the USA in Southeast Asia.
- In this pursuit, former Prime minister of India P V Narasimha Rao **launched Look East policy in 1992, to give a strategic push to India's engagement with the South-East Asia region**, to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China.
- **Difference Between Look East and Act East:**
  - **Look East:**
    - Look East policy focused on the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** countries + Economic Integration.
      - India became a **dialogue partner of ASEAN** in 1996 and summit level partner in 2002.
      - In 2012 the relationship got **up-graded into a Strategic Partnership**.
      - The time when India launched the Look East Policy in 1992, India's trade with ASEAN was USD 2 billion. After signing the Free Trade Agreement in 2010 with ASEAN, the **trade has grown to USD 72 billion (2017-18)**.
      - India is also an active participant in several regional forums like the **East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)** etc.



- **Act East:**
  - Act East Policy focused on ASEAN countries + Economic Integration + **East Asian countries + Security cooperation.**
    - Prime minister of India highlighted **4C's of Act East Policy.**
      - Culture
      - Commerce
      - Connectivity
      - Capacity building
  - Security is an important dimension of India's Act East Policy.
    - In the context of growing Chinese assertiveness in the **South China Sea** and the Indian Ocean, **securing freedom of navigation and India's own role in the Indian Ocean** is a key feature of Act East Policy.
    - In pursuance of this, India has been engaged under the narrative of Indo-pacific and informal grouping called **Quad.**
- **Initiatives to Enhance Connectivity:**
  - **Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link** between India and Bangladesh.
  - Intermodal transport linkages and **inland waterways through Bangladesh.**
  - **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project** and the **Trilateral Highway Project** connecting the North East with Myanmar and Thailand.
  - Under **India-Japan Act East Forum**, projects such as **Road and Bridges** and modernization of **Hydro-electric power projects** have been undertaken.
    - **India-Japan Act East Forum** was established in 2017 which aims to provide a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's "**Act East Policy**" and Japan's "**Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy**".
    - The Forum will **identify specific projects for economic modernization of India's North-East region** including those pertaining to connectivity, developmental infrastructure, industrial linkages as well as people-to-people contacts through tourism, culture and sports-related activities.
- **Other Initiatives:**
  - Assistance extended in the form of **medicines/medical supplies to ASEAN countries during the pandemic.**
  - Scholarships with offers of 1000 PhD fellowships have been offered at IITs for ASEAN countries participants.
  - India is also implementing **Quick Impact Projects** in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to provide development assistance to grass-

root level communities in the fields of education, water resources, health etc.

- **Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)** are small-scale, low cost projects that are planned and implemented within a short timeframe.

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

### **4. Coalition for Disaster resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**

The Prime Minister has recently addressed the third edition of the annual conference of the Coalition for Disaster resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

#### **What is CDRI?**

- The CDRI is an international coalition of countries, UN agencies, multilateral development banks, the private sector, and academic institutions that aim to promote disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- Its objective is to promote research and knowledge sharing in the fields of infrastructure risk management, standards, financing, and recovery mechanisms.
- It was launched by the Indian PM Narendra Modi at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019.
- CDRI's initial focus is on developing disaster-resilience in ecological, social, and economic infrastructure.
- It aims to achieve substantial changes in member countries' policy frameworks and future infrastructure investments, along with a major decrease in the economic losses suffered due to disasters.

#### **Its inception**

- PM Modi's experience in dealing with the aftermath of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake" as the chief minister led him to the idea.
- The CDRI was later conceptualized in the first and second edition of the International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (IWDRRI) in 2018-19.
- It was organized by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in partnership with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the UN Development Programme, the World Bank, and the Global Commission on Adaptation.

### Its diplomatic significance

- The CDRI is the second major coalition launched by India outside of the UN, the first being the International Solar Alliance.
- Both of them are seen as India's attempts to obtain a global leadership role in climate change matters and were termed as part of India's stronger branding.
- India can use the CDRI to provide a safer alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well.

## 5. World Air Quality Report 2020

### Why in News

The **World Air Quality Report**, prepared by Swiss organisation **IQAir**, mentions that **22 of the top 30 most polluted cities globally are in India.**

- The Report aggregated **PM2.5 data from 106 countries.**

### PM 2.5

- It is an atmospheric particulate matter of diameter of fewer than 2.5 micrometres, which is around 3% the diameter of a human hair.
- It causes respiratory problems and also reduces visibility. It is an endocrine disruptor that can affect insulin secretion and insulin sensitivity, thus contributing to diabetes.
- It is very small and can only be detected with the help of an electron microscope.
- Some are emitted directly from a source, such as construction sites, unpaved roads, fields, smokestacks or fires.
- Most particles form in the atmosphere as a result of complex reactions of chemicals such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which are pollutants emitted from power plants, industries and automobiles.

### Key Points

- **World Capital City Ranking:**
  - **Delhi** has been ranked as the **world's most polluted capital city** followed by **Dhaka (Bangladesh), Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia), Kabul (Afghanistan), Doha (Qatar).**
- **World Country Ranking:**
  - **Bangladesh** has been ranked as the **most polluted country followed by Pakistan and India.**

- The least polluted country is Puerto Rico, followed by New Caledonia, US Virgin Islands respectively.
- **World City Ranking:**
  - **Hotan in China** is the **most polluted city** with an average concentration of  $110.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  followed by **Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh** at 106.
- **Indian Scenario:**
  - Shows a **boost in Delhi's air quality** by approximately **15% from 2019 to 2020**.
    - Delhi has been listed as the **10<sup>th</sup> most polluted city** and the **top polluted capital city in the world**.
  - **Ghaziabad is the second most polluted city in the world** followed by Bulandshahar, Birsakh Jalalpur, Bhiwadi, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur and Lucknow.
  - Compared to **north Indian cities**, the cities in the **Deccan recorded relatively better air quality**, remaining above the daily WHO limits of  $25 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for most part of 2020.
    - However, **every city in India observed air quality improvements compared to 2018 and earlier**, while 63% saw direct improvements against 2019.
  - **Major sources of India's air pollution** include transportation, biomass burning for cooking, electricity generation, industry, construction, waste burning, and episodic agricultural burning.
    - 2020 was a particularly **severe year for agricultural burning** in which farmers set fire to crop residue after a harvest. **Farm fires in Punjab increased 46.5% over 2019**.
- **Covid and Its Impact :**
  - In 2020, the spread of Covid-19 raised new concerns as **exposure to particle pollution was found to increase vulnerability to the virus and its impact on health**.
  - Early reports suggest that the **proportion of Covid-19 deaths attributed to air pollution exposure ranges from 7% to 33%**.

### Air Pollution in Delhi

- Air pollution in Delhi-NCR and the Indo Gangetic Plains is a complex phenomenon that is dependent on a variety of factors.
- **Change in Wind Direction:**
  - October usually marks the withdrawal of **monsoons** in Northwest India and during this time, the predominant direction of winds is northwesterly.
  - The direction of the wind is northwesterly in summers as well, which brings the dust from northern Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- **Reduced Wind Speed:**
  - High-speed winds are very effective at dispersing pollutants, but winters bring a dip in wind speed overall as compared to in summers which makes the region prone to pollution.
  - Also, Delhi lies in a landlocked region which does not have a geographical advantage that eastern, western or southern parts of the country enjoy where the sea breeze disperses the concentrated pollutants.
- **Stubble Burning:**
  - **Stubble burning in Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana is blamed for causing a thick blanket of smog in Delhi during winters.**
    - It emits large amounts of toxic pollutants in the atmosphere which contain harmful gases like methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), volatile organic compounds (VOC) and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.
  - Farm fires have been an easy way to get rid of paddy stubble quickly and at low cost for several years.
- **Vehicular Pollution:**
  - It is **one of the biggest causes of dipping air quality in Delhi** in winters and around 20% of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in winters comes from it.
- **Dust Storms:**
  - **Dust storms from Gulf countries enhance the already worse condition.** Dry cold weather means dust is prevalent in the entire region, which does not see many rainy days between October and June.
  - **Dust pollution contributes to around 56%** of PM<sub>10</sub> and the PM<sub>2.5</sub> load.
- **Dip in Temperatures:**
  - As temperature dips, the **inversion height is lowered and the concentration of pollutants in the air increases** when this happens.
    - **Inversion height** is the layer beyond which pollutants cannot disperse into the upper layer of the atmosphere.
- **Firecrackers:**
  - Despite the **ban on cracker sales, firecrackers are a common sight on Diwali.** It may not be the top reason for air pollution, but it definitely contributed to its build-up.
- **Construction Activities and Open Waste Burning:**
  - Large-scale construction in Delhi-NCR is another culprit that is increasing dust and pollution in the air. Delhi also has landfill sites for the dumping of waste and burning of waste in these sites also contributes to air pollution.

## Major Measures Taken

- **Subsidy to farmers for buying Turbo Happy Seeder (THS)** which is a machine mounted on a tractor that cuts and uproots the stubble, in order to reduce stubble burning.
- The **introduction of BS-VI vehicles**, push for **electric vehicles (EVs)**, **Odd-Even** as an emergency measure and **construction of the Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways to reduce vehicular pollution.**
- **Implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** to tackle the rising pollution in the Capital. It includes measures like shutting down thermal power plants and a ban on construction activities.
- **Development of the National AQI** for public information under the aegis of the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**. AQI has been developed for eight pollutants viz. PM2.5, PM10, Ammonia, Lead, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, ozone, and carbon monoxide.

### Way Forward

- Appropriate political will and aware citizenry is a prerequisite to tackle the menace, otherwise, all the measures will remain on paper only and greater public transparency is essential to the success of winning the war on air pollution.
- There is no better watchdog than active citizens, which is why the pollution targets must be made public every year for their perusal and to be evaluated at the end of the year.
- Breathing clean air is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen. Therefore, human health must become a priority when it comes to tackling air pollution.

## 6. How e-commerce marketplaces can drive MSME makeover

### Facilitating manufacturing through MSMEs

- A significant major contributor to the India growth story is going to be **manufacturing.**
- Manufacturing by small units, cottage units and MSMEs, if effectively facilitated, will be the game changer.
- For MSMEs to be sustainable and effective, the need of the hour is not just better automation but also more channels for **accessing greater markets and opportunities** to become a part of the **national and global supply chains.**
- **E-commerce marketplaces** are today the best possible enablers for this transformation at **minimal cost, innovation and investment.**

### Need to invest in digital transformation and technology

- China captured the world market through the traditional method of having guilds and business centres.

- Today, **digital empowerment is the key differentiator.**
- Without that, our MSMEs will not be future ready.
- E-commerce allows products even from hinterlands to get to the national market, thus, providing opportunities to artisans and small sellers from Tier-2/3 towns to sell online to customers **beyond their local catchment.**
- By investing in supply chains, the e-commerce sector provides opportunities for MSMEs **to partner them in supply and delivery networks.**
- Start-ups and young brands are also finding opportunities to build national brands and even going global.
- This leads to additional income generation through multiple livelihood opportunities.
- Many offline stores are also **adopting e-commerce to leverage these opportunities** and the traditional and modern retail models are moving towards **more offline and online collaborations.**

## Challenges in building robust e-commerce sector

### 1) No GST threshold exemption

- Sellers on e-commerce marketplaces do not get advantage of GST threshold exemption (of Rs 40 lakh) **for intra-state supplies.**
- Online suppliers have to “compulsorily register” even though their turnover is low.
- Offline sellers enjoy this exemption up to the turnover threshold of Rs. 40 lakh.

### 2) Principal place of business issue

- Today, the sellers, as in offline, are required to have a physical PPOB which, given the nature of e-commerce, is not practical.
- The government would do well to simplify the “**Principal Place of Business**” (PPOB) requirement especially for online sellers by **making it digital.**
- Replace physical PPOB with **Place of Communication.**
- Eliminating the need for state specific physical PPOB requirement will facilitate sellers **to get state-level GST with a single national place of business.**

### 3) Support MSMEs to understand e-commerce

- MSMEs should be provided with handholding support to understand how e-commerce functions.
- The government can **collaborate with e-commerce entities** to leverage their expertise and scale to create special **on-boarding** programmes.
- These can be provided by state governments.

- There is need to examine the existing schemes and benefits for MSMEs, which were formulated with an offline, physical market in mind.

#### 4) Build infrastructure

- There is a need to build infrastructure – both physical and digital infrastructure is important for digital transformation.
- The road and telecom network will facilitate access to the consumer and enable the seller from remote areas to enter the larger national market as well as the export market.
- A robust logistic network and warehouse chains created by e-commerce platforms enable similar access and reach.
- **The National Logistics Policy should focus on e-commerce sector needs.**

#### 5) Skilling policies for e-commerce sector

- Dovetail the skilling policy and programmes with the requirements of the e-commerce sector to meet future demand of the sector.

#### 6) Steps to increase export via e-commerce

- We need to take specific steps to increase exports via e-commerce.
- There is a need to identify products that have potential for the export market, connect e-commerce with export-oriented manufacturing clusters, encourage tie-ups with sector-specific export promotion councils, leverage existing SEZs to create e-commerce export zones.
- **India Posts can play a significant role** by creating e-commerce specific small parcel solutions at competitive rates, building a parcel tracking system, and partnering with foreign post offices to enable customs clearances.

#### Way forward

- There is an urgent need to create a **consolidated policy framework for e-commerce exports.**
- Policies like the upcoming Foreign Trade Policy needs to be fully leveraged.
- The **Foreign Trade Policy** should identify areas and include e-commerce export specific provisions in the revised policy that comes into effect in April this year.

### 7. Pilibhit Tiger Reserve: Uttar Pradesh

#### Why in News



A carcass of a five-year-old tigress was found in the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (Uttar Pradesh).

### Key Points

- **About:**
  - It is **located in Pilibhit and Shahjahanpur district of Uttar Pradesh.**
  - It was **notified as Tiger Reserve in 2014.**
    - In 2020, it bagged **international award TX2** for doubling up the number of tigers in the past four years.
  - It forms the part of **Terai Arc Landscape** in the **upper Gangetic Plain.**
  - The **northern edge of the reserve lies along the Indo-Nepal border** while the **southern boundary is marked by the river Sharada and Khakra.**
- **Flora and Fauna:**
  - It is home to a habitat for over 127 animals, 326 bird species and 2,100 flowering plants.
  - Wild animals include **tiger, swamp deer, bengal florican, leopard, etc.**
  - It has high **sal forests**, plantation and grasslands with several water bodies.
- **Other Protected Areas in Uttar Pradesh**
  - **Dudhwa National Park**
  - **National Chambal Sanctuary**
  - **Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary**
  - **Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary**

### Terai Arc Landscape

- The Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) is **an 810 km stretch between the river Yamuna in the west and the river Bhagmati in the east.**
  - **Bhagmati River** is a river in south-central Nepal and northern Bihar state.
- Comprises the **Shivalik hills**, the adjoining **bhabhar areas** and the **Terai flood plains.**
  - The **bhabhar** is that part of the Indian Northern Plains where the rivers, after descending from the mountains, deposit pebbles. It is a narrow belt, having a width of about 8 to 16 km and lying parallel to the slopes of the Shiwaliks.
  - All the streams disappear in this bhabhar belt. South of this belt, the streams and rivers re-emerge and **create a wet, swampy and marshy region known as terai.**
- It is **spread across the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and the low lying hills of Nepal.**

- It boasts of some of India's most well-known **Tiger Reserves and Protected Areas** such as **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (Uttarakhand), **Rajaji National Park** (Uttarakhand), **Dudhwa Tiger Reserve** (Uttar Pradesh), **Valmiki Tiger Reserve** (Bihar).
- In total, **the landscape has 13 Protected Areas, 9 in India and 4 in Nepal**, covering a total area of 49,500 km<sup>2</sup>, of which **30,000km<sup>2</sup> lies in India**.
- The forests are **home to three flagship species**, the **Bengal tiger** (*Panthera tigris*), the **greater one horned rhino** (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) and the **Asian elephant** (*Elephas maximus*).



**Prelims Practice Questions**

**1. Consider the following statements:**

1. The heavy metals are released in the environment by natural sources only.
2. The heavy metals found in drinking water have beneficial effects on the human body.

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 : D**

**Explanation**

- The term heavy metal refers to any metallic chemical element that has a relatively high density ( $> 5 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ) and is toxic or poisonous at low concentrations.
  - Examples of heavy metals include mercury (Hg), cadmium (Cd), arsenic (As), chromium (Cr), thallium (Tl), and lead (Pb)
- **Source of Heavy Metals:**
  - Heavy metals are introduced into the environment either by natural means or by human activities.
    - **Natural Sources:** Geographical phenomena like volcanic eruptions, weathering of rocks, leaching into rivers, lakes and oceans due to action of water.
    - **Anthropogenic Sources:** These metals are released into the water through anthropogenic activities such as mining, manufacturing, electroplating, electronics, discharge from auto exhaust, domestic waste, agricultural waste and fertilizer production. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- **Effect of Heavy Metals on Human:**
  - There are some essential heavy metals which the human body requires in trace amounts such as Cobalt, copper, zinc, and manganese but in the excessive amount, it can be detrimental to health.
  - The **heavy metals found in drinking water** such as lead, mercury, arsenic, and cadmium have **no beneficial effects on your body. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

- In fact, their accumulation inside the body can cause severe health problems.

**2. The World Energy Transitions Outlook is brought out by:**

- a. International Atomic Energy Agency
- b. International Renewable Energy Agency
- c. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- d. Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Organization

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

The World Energy Transitions Outlook is brought out by the International Renewable Energy Agency.

**3. Consider the following statements:**

1. The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) is a Central Sector Scheme.
2. The nominated members of Rajya Sabha are not entitled to use funds from the MPLAD scheme.

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 : A**

**Explanation**

- The **Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)** is a **Central Sector Scheme** which was announced in December 1993. Hence, **statement 1 is correct.**
  - Initially, it came under the control of the Ministry of Rural Development. Later, in October 1994, it was transferred to the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.**
- **Functioning:**

- Each year, MPs receive **Rs. 5 crore in two instalments of Rs. 2.5 crore each**. Funds under MPLADS are non-lapsable.
- Lok Sabha MPs have to **recommend the district authorities** projects in their Lok Sabha constituencies, while **Rajya Sabha MPs** have to spend it in the **state that has elected** them to the House.
- **Nominated Members** of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can **recommend works anywhere in the country**. Hence, **statement 2 is not correct**.

**4. Consider the following statements with respect to Development Finance Institutions:**

1. Industrial Finance Corporation of India was the first DFI in India.
2. The Budget 2021-22 has provided for an initial amount of ₹20,000 crore for the DFIs.
3. DFIs do not accept deposits.

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

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- IFCI – 1<sup>st</sup> DFI in India. Industrial Finance Corporation of India was established in 1948.
- The Budget 2021-22 has provided for an initial amount of ₹20,000 crore for the DFIs.
- DFIs do not accept deposits.
- The development finance institutions or development finance companies are organizations owned by the government or charitable institutions to provide funds for low-capital projects or where their borrowers are unable to get it from commercial lenders.

**5. Consider the following statements:**

1. Periyar River originates from Sivagiri hills of Western Ghats.
2. Cheruthoni and Perinjankutti are the tributaries of Periyar River.

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 :C**

### **Explanation**

- The **Periyar River** is the longest river in the state of Kerala with a length of 244 km.
- It is also known as 'Lifeline of Kerala' as it is one of the few perennial rivers in the state.
  - A perennial river is a channel that has continuous flow in parts of its stream bed all year round.
- Periyar River originates from **Sivagiri hills of Western Ghats** and flows through the Periyar National Park. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The **main tributaries of Periyar** are Muthirapuzha, Mullayar, **Cheruthoni and Perinjankutti. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

**6. Mullaperiyar Dam dispute is between which of the following states?**

1. Kerala
2. Andhra Pradesh
3. Karnataka
4. Tamil Nadu

**Choose the correct option:**

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

**Answer: d**

### **Explanation:**

- The Mullaperiyar Dam is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River in the Indian state of Kerala.

- The dam is located in Kerala on the river Periyar, but is operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu state.
- The dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu states is because of the control and safety of the dam and the validity and fairness of the lease agreement. The dispute began in 1998 when Tamil Nadu wanted to raise the height of the water level and Kerala opposed it.



## **Mains Practice Questions**

**1Q. Discuss the similarities and differences between the basic tenets of Buddhism and Jainism.**

### **Approach**

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the origin of both religions.
- Discuss the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Jainism.
- Conclude Suitably.

**2Q. What are the reasons that led to the rise of Bhakti movement in India and what was its impact? (250 words)**

### **Approach**

- Write in brief about the Bhakti Movement in the introduction.
- Give the reasons that led to the rise of Bhakti movement.
- Elaborate on its Impact on the society.