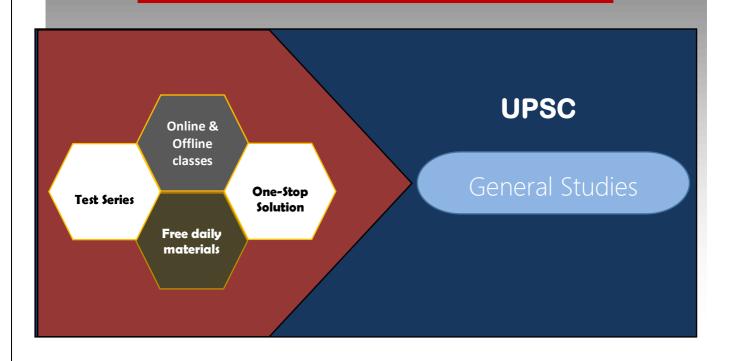**VISHNU**
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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Why no decision on list sent by Collegium, SC asks government

Context:

The Supreme Court asked the government to clarify the status of 55 recommendations made by the Collegium for judicial appointments to High Courts six months to nearly a year-and-a-half ago.

Details:

- The Supreme Court has been repeatedly conveying to the government its growing concerns about the judicial vacancies in High Courts.
- Of the pending recommendations, 44 were made to fill vacancies in the Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh, Guwahati, Rajasthan and Punjab High Courts.
- These recommendations have been pending with the government for over seven months to a year.

Judicial Appointments to High Courts:

- Collegium System is a legally valid system of appointment and transfer of judges in the SC and all HCs.
  o The names are decided by a forum of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.
- There is no mention of the Collegium either in the original Constitution of India or in successive amendments.
- The recommendations of the Collegium are binding on the Central Government if the Collegium sends the names of the judges/lawyers to the government for the second time.
- But a time limit is not fixed for the government to give assent to the names. This is the reason that appointment of judges takes a long time.

2. SC suggests posting retired judges to clear backlog in HCs

Context:

The Supreme Court pushed for the appointment of retired judges to battle the pendency of cases in High Courts.

Issues:

- There are suits pending in chartered courts, and in North India, some courts have cases pending for 30 years.
- Judicial pendency has become a great cause of concern.

Details:

- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said retired judges could be chosen on the basis of their expertise in a particular field of dispute and allowed to retire once the pendency in that zone of law was over.
- It said retired judges who had handled certain disputes and fields of law for over 15 years could deal with them faster if brought back into harness as ad-hoc judges.
- The court orally outlined prospective guidelines for the appointment and functioning of an ad hoc judge.
- The Chief Justice said the appointment of ad-hoc judges was provided for in the Constitution under Article 224A.
  - Under the Article, the Chief Justice of a High Court for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of judge of that court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a judge of the High Court for that State.

3. Apex court bats for women officers in Army

Context:

The Supreme Court held that the Army's selective evaluation process discriminates against and disproportionately affects women short service commission officers seeking a permanent commission.

Details:

- The bench observed that the evaluation criteria set by the Army constituted systemic discrimination against the women officers.
- It said that the evaluation pattern of women officers has caused them economic and psychological harm.

Way Forward:

- In a series of directions, the court ordered that the cases of women officers who have applied for permanent commission should be reconsidered in a month and the decision on them should be given in two months.
- They would be considered for permanent commission subject to disciplinary and vigilance clearance. The court said physical standards should be kept at a premium during selection.

Note:

In July 2020, a Formal Government Sanction Letter was issued by the Ministry of Defence for grant of Permanent Commission (PC) to women officers in the Army.

4. 'Vaccines effective in preventing severe illness caused by variants'

Context:

Interview with the Director of Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry, about the unique double mutant COVID-19 virus found in India, its implication for the country which is at the beginning of the second wave of infections and the importance of vaccination.

What do the COVID-19 variants and double mutants found in India mean for the ongoing pandemic and second wave that the country is witnessing?

- The genome sequencing data of the COVID-19 virus from INSACOG show that nearly 7.7% of the nearly 11,000 specimens tested contained one of the viral variants.
- Viruses develop changes in their genomes very often during their multiplication and spread. The progeny viruses with one or more such changes are referred to as 'variants'.
- The 'double mutant' simply means that this virus has two mutations, each of which has individually been seen in viruses from other parts of the world, except that it has both these mutations simultaneously.

Why are some variants a reason for concern? And are the variants detected in India 'variants of concern'?

- A 'variant of interest' refers to variants that appear to be associated with a special characteristic, but evidence is still limited.

- A 'variant of concern', on the other hand, is one where there is evidence supporting such association.
- These special characteristics of a variant could be an increased risk of transmission, causing more severe disease, failure of detection by the usual tests, or a higher risk of infection after prior infection or vaccination.
- Three variants of concern have been detected in India. These had been first identified in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil, respectively, and have been identified in several countries globally. These are of concern primarily because they have an increased potential for spread from one person to another.

How to contain the spread of variant of concern?

- Simple measures, such as the proper use of face masks and of physical distancing, are highly effective in preventing the spread of these variant strains.
- Hence, their spread can be effectively controlled by following these steps.

Is the current vaccination drive enough to control the pandemic?

- The current COVID-19 vaccination drive is not really for controlling the spread, but to protect those who are likely to develop severe disease.
- The primary aim of the drive is to reduce the need for ICU beds, the use of ventilators, and deaths.
- As immunisation continues and covers a large proportion of the population, it eventually will lead to a reduction in cases as well. In some small countries, such as Israel, where immunisation coverage is high, the disease rate has come down remarkably.

5. Remove the wedges in India-Bangladesh ties

Introduction

- 2021 marks 50 years since the independence of Bangladesh. India has played a key role in Bangladesh's Liberation War and the friendship continues to grow. India lent its support on the political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian front, and India's soldiers gave up their lives and an estimated 10 million Bangladeshi refugees took shelter in India.

Tracing the journey of the relationship

- The relationship between India and Bangladesh has vacillated through highs and lows depending on the regimes in power.

- It had remained cordial until the assassination of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, followed by a period of military rule and the rise of General Ziaur Rahman who became President and also assassinated in 1981.
- It thawed during the period of 1982-1991 when a military-led government by General H.M. Ershad ruled the country.
- Since Bangladesh's return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, we have seen drastic developments. In the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence.

Achievements and Progress

- Both the countries have solved the border issues amicably by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, where enclaves were exchanged allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh.
- The Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has uprooted anti-India insurgency elements from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful.
- This has allowed India to make a massive redeployment of resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere along India's borders and tension prone areas.

Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh

- Bangladesh today is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at $9.21 billion and imports at $1.04 billion.
- India has offered duty-free access to multiple Bangladeshi products.
- India has extended three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to $8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.

Issues

- In the last eight years until 2019, only 51% of the first $800 million line of credit has been utilised whilst barely any amount from the next two lines of credit worth $6.5 billion has been mobilised.
- This delay and progress is due to red-tapism from India's end and from Bangladesh's side, it may be due to the slow implementation of the project.

The connectivity boost

Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved.

- A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala runs a route distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km it would have run through the Chicken's Neck, to remain within India.
- There are three passenger and freight railway services running between the two countries, with two more routes on their way to be restored.
- Recently, a 1.9-kilometre long bridge, the Maitri Setu, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.

Enhanced cooperation in shipping and inland water trade.

- Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram (Chittagong) seaports carried by road, rail, and waterways to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola, and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar.
- This allows landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the Chattogram and Mongla ports.

Bones of contention

- Despite the remarkable progress, the unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large.
- Border killings are yet to stop. The year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force. The shots are fired at civilians, usually cattle traders, who are usually unarmed, trying to illegally cross the border.
- The government's proposal to implement the National Register of Citizens across the whole of India may result in a bleak atmosphere between the countries.
- It remains to be seen how India addresses the deportation of illegal Muslim immigrants, some of whom claim to have come from Bangladesh.

China's influence in the region

- In spite of its 'Neighborhood First Policy', India has been losing its influence in the region to China.
- Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, once considered traditional Indian allies, are increasingly tilting towards China due to the Asian giant's massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments in these countries.
- Bhutan also does not abide by Indian influence as evinced by its withdrawal from the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) motor vehicles agreement.

- China, in lieu of its cheque-book diplomacy, is well-entrenched in South Asia, including Bangladesh, with which it enjoys significant economic and defence relations.

Way forward

- India-Bangladesh relations have been gaining positive momentum over the last decade.
- Going forward India has to be generous enough to let the water flow (the Teesta issue has to be settled) and the issues concerning illegal migration has to be addressed by well-established protocols of both countries.
- Trade could be more balanced if non-tariff barriers from the Indian side could be removed.
- These small but important steps can remove long-standing snags in a relationship that otherwise is gradually coming of age in 50 years.

Conclusion

- To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the three Cs — cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation.

6. Here is why the electoral bonds scheme must go

Context

- The Supreme Court, after a brief hearing on March 24, reserved orders on the **question of whether or not to stay the electoral bond scheme**, ahead of the upcoming State elections.

Issues

1) Against democracy

- When citizens cast their votes they have the right to do so **on the basis of full and complete information.**
- And there is no piece of information more important than the **knowledge of who funds political parties.**
- The Indian Supreme Court has long held — and rightly so — that the **"right to know"**, especially in the context of elections, is **an integral part of the right to freedom of expression** under the Indian Constitution.
- **By keeping this knowledge from citizens** and voters, the electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy.

2) Aids role of money in influencing politics

- It is equally important that if a democracy is to thrive, the role of money in influencing politics ought to be limited.
- In many advanced countries, for example, **elections are funded publicly.**
- The purpose of this is to guarantee a somewhat level playing field, so that elections are a battle of ideas and not money.
- The electoral bonds scheme, however, removes all pre-existing limits on political donations, **and effectively allows well-resourced corporations to buy politicians** by paying immense sums of money.

3) Creates asymmetry in donation

- Electoral bonds allow receiving limitless donation and that too asymmetrically.
- Since the donations are routed through the State Bank of India, it is possible for the government to find out who is donating to which party, **but not for the political opposition to know**.
- This, in turn, means that every donor is aware that the central government **can trace their donations back to them.**
- Statistics bear this out: a vast majority of the immensely vast sums donated through multiple electoral cycles over the last three years, have gone to the ruling party.

Issues with the government's defence

- The government has attempted to justify the electoral bonds scheme by arguing that its purpose is **to prevent the flow of black money into elections.**
- It is entirely unclear what preventing black money has to do with **donor anonymity, making donations limitless**, and leaving citizens in the dark.
- Indeed, as the electoral bonds scheme allows even foreign donations to political parties.
- With this the **prospects of institutional corruption including by foreign sources increases** with the electoral bonds scheme, instead of decreasing.

Constitutional objections

- The objections to the electoral bonds scheme, highlighted above, are not objections rooted in political morality, or in public policy, they are **constitutional objections.**
- The **right to know** has long been enshrined as a part of the right to freedom of expression.

- Uncapping political donations and introducing a structural bias into the form of the donations **violate both the guarantee of equality before law**, as well as being manifestly arbitrary.

Judiciary must act

- Governments derive their **legitimacy from elections.**
- However, for just that reason the process that leads up to the formation of the government should **be policed with particular vigilance.**
- In other words, the electoral legitimacy of the government is questionable if the electoral process has become questionable.
- The courts is the only independent body that can adequately umpire and enforce the ground rules of democracy.

Conclusion

The government should take into account the distorting effect of the electoral bonds scheme and take measures to remove the provisions in the scheme that leaves the scope for its misuse.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Mission Karmayogi

The Union Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions has informed about the Mission Karmayogi to Parliament.

Mission Karmayogi

- The mission is established under the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB).
- It is aimed at building a future-ready civil service with the right attitude, skills and knowledge, aligned to the vision of New India.
- It is meant to be a comprehensive post-recruitment reform of the Centre's human resource development, in much the same way as the National Recruitment Agency approved last week is pre-recruitment reform.

Why such a mission?

- The capacity of Civil Services plays a vital role in rendering a wide variety of services, implementing welfare programs and performing core governance functions.

Major undertakings of the scheme

- The scheme will cover 46 lakh, Central government employees, at all levels, and involve an outlay of ₹510 crores over a five-year period, according to an official statement.
- The programme will support a transition from "rules-based to roles-based" HR management so that work allocations can be done by matching an official's competencies to the requirements of the post.
- Apart from domain knowledge training, the scheme will focus on "functional and behavioural competencies" as well, and also includes a monitoring framework for performance evaluations.
- Eventually, service matters such as confirmation after the probation period, deployment, work assignments and notification of vacancies will all be integrated into the proposed framework.
- The capacity building will be delivered through the iGOT Karmayogi digital platform, with content drawn from global best practices rooted in Indian national ethos.

Apex bodies under the mission

- The Prime Minister's Public Human Resource Council will be set up as the apex body to direct the reforms.
- There will be an autonomous Capacity Building Commission to be established to manage the reformed system and harmonize training standards across the country so that there is a common understanding of India's aspirations and development goals.
- A wholly government-owned, not-for-profit special purpose vehicle will be set up to own and operate the digital platform and its content.

2. Enhancing the Indo-Bangladesh cooperation

New era of cooperation

- In the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation.
- These ties have moved beyond **historical and cultural ties** to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence.
- Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their **border issues peacefully** by ratifying the historic **Land Boundary Agreement in 2015.**
- The Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has **uprooted anti-India insurgency elements** from its borders.

Bilateral trade and tourism

- Bangladesh today is **India's biggest trading partner in South Asia** with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at **$9.21 billion and imports at $1.04 billion.**
- India has offered **duty free access** to multiple Bangladeshi products.
- While India has given duty-free access to a number of Bangladeshi goods, its physical enormity precludes circumstances that could have Bangladesh enhance the quantum of exports.
- Trade could be more balanced if non-tariff barriers from the Indian side could be removed.
- Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi.
- Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

Cooperation on development

- India extended **three lines of credit** to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to $8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
- However, in eight years until 2019, only 51% of the first $800 million line of credit has been utilised.
- Barely any amount from the next two lines of credit worth $6.5 billion has been mobilised.
- This has been mostly due to **red-tapism from India's end,** and **slow project implementation on Bangladesh's end.**

Connectivity

- Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved.
- A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala runs a route distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km if it ran through the Chicken's Neck to remain within India.
- There are three passenger and freight railway services running between the two countries, with two more routes on their way to be restored.
- The inauguration of the **Chilahati-Haldibari railway link** has been a significant move in enhancing connectivity between the countries.
- Recently, a 1.9 kilometre long bridge, the Maitri Setu, was inaugurated connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its various ports.
- This allows landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the **Chattogram and Mongla ports.**

Issues

- Despite the remarkable progress, the **unresolved Teesta water sharing issue** looms large.
- While smuggling needs to be dealt with firmly, it is not acceptable for Bangladeshis that rather than apprehending people trying to make an illegal entry into India, **the BSF has been shooting them.**
- Indian government's proposal to implement the **National Register of Citizens** across the whole of India reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations.

Way forward

- India-Bangladesh relations have been gaining positive momentum over the last decade.
- As the larger country, the onus is on India to be generous enough to let the water flow and ensure that people are not killed on the border for cattle.

Conclusion

To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the three Cs — cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation

3. Suez Canal temporarily halts navigation

What's in News?

A huge container ship has blocked the Suez Canal which is likely to take weeks to free. Officials have stopped all ships from entering the channel.

- The blockage has already hit world oil markets.
- A Marine Traffic map showed large clusters of vessels circling as they waited in both the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Red Sea to the south.
- Historic sections of the canal were reopened in a bid to ease the bottleneck, with dozens of ships waiting at both ends of the waterway.

Suez Canal:

- The Suez Canal is a critical shipping artery that connects the Mediterranean and Red Seas through Egypt (Isthmus of Suez).
- Constructed between 1859 and 1869, it officially opened in 1869.
- It was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956.
- The canal offers a more direct route between the North Atlantic and northern Indian ocean via the Mediterranean and Red seas, thus avoiding the South Atlantic and southern Indian ocean and reducing the journey distance between Asia and Europe.
- It is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes, carrying over 12% of world trade by volume.
- It is an absolutely critical route because all traffic arriving from Asia goes through the Suez Canal.
- Egypt depends heavily on revenues from the canal.

4. In signal to China, U.S. raised India ties during Alaska talks

What's in News?

The Joe Biden administration highlighted the strength of U.S.-India ties in its meeting with Chinese officials in Alaska.

- It underlined how it has increasingly come to view India as central to its broader objectives in dealing with China in the Indo-Pacific region.
- U.S.-India relations, only two months into the new administration in the U.S, are developing robustly.
- The broader reason for the smooth transition in India-U.S. relations is the new administration's emphasis on a bipartisan approach to India and other key foreign policy issues.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

5. Amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has proposed several amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA), which may enable infrastructure projects to come up in the forest areas more easily.

What are the amendments?

- They propose to grant exemptions to railways, roads, tree plantations, oil exploration, wildlife tourism and 'strategic' projects in forests.
- The proposal also aims to empower state governments to lease forest land to private individuals and corporations.
- If the proposed amendments come into force, they would dilute the provisions of the landmark 1996 decision of the Supreme Court in Godavarman

The amendments, however, propose two changes to strengthen the applicability of the FCA, according to the documents accessed:

1. To complete the process of forest identification in a time-bound manner
2. To enable the creation of 'no-go' areas, where specific projects would not be allowed

The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

The FCA is the principal legislation that regulates deforestation in the country.

- It prohibits the felling of forests for any "non-forestry" use without prior clearance by the central government.
- The clearance process includes seeking consent from local forest rights-holders and from wildlife authorities.
- The Centre is empowered to reject such requests or allow it with legally binding conditions.
- In a landmark decision in 1996, the Supreme Court had expanded the coverage of FCA to all areas that satisfied the dictionary definition of a forest; earlier, only lands specifically notified as forests were protected by the enforcement of the FCA.

The FCA is brief legislation with only five sections of which-

- Section 1 defines the extent of coverage of the law,
- Section 2 restrictions of activities in forest areas and the rest deals with the creation of advisory committees, powers of rule-making and penalties.

Key propositions of the Amendment

The proposed amendments seek to make additions and changes to Section 1 and 2.

(1) Concessions to survey and exploration

- In the proposed new section 1A, a provision has been added to exempt the application of FCA on forest land that is "used for underground exploration and production of oil and natural gas through Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) originating outside forest land."
- The exemption is subject to terms and conditions laid down by the central government.
- A new explanation added to Section 2 says that "survey, reconnaissance, prospecting, exploration or investigation" for future activity in the forest will not be classified as a "non-forestry activity".
- This means such survey works would not require any prior permission from the government.

The only exception is if the activity falls within a wildlife sanctuary, national park or tiger reserve.

(2) Exemptions to Railways and roads inside forests

- Land acquired by the railways for establishing a rail line or a road by a government agency before 25.10.1980 (the day the FCA was passed) would be exempted from seeking a forest clearance — if they put the land to the same use for which it was acquired.
- This is included in a provision in the proposed section 1A.
- The exemption is subject to terms and conditions that the central government will lay down through guidelines, which include planting trees to compensate for the loss of forests.

(3) Leases on forest land

- Section 2(iii) of the FCA requires the central government's approval before assigning forest lands on lease to any private person/corporation/organisation not owned or controlled by the central government.
- This clause, however, has purportedly been deleted in the proposed amendment.

- This may mean that state governments can issue leases for the use of forest land without the Centre's prior approval.

(4) Exemptions to plantations

- A new explanation to Section 2 proposes to exempt plantation of native species of palm and oil-bearing trees from the definition of "non-forest purpose".
- Since the FCA applies to the conversion of forest land to "non-forest purpose", this proposed amendment would effectively mean that anyone who wants to clear a natural forest to raise such plantations would not require any approval from the government.
- The government will only impose conditions for compensatory afforestation and payment of other levies and compensations.

(5) Exemptions to wildlife tourism, training infrastructure

- The FCA classifies activities related to wildlife conservation as "non-forestry" purposes, which means such activities — building checkpoints, communication infrastructure, fencing, boundary, etc — which include do not need a forest clearance.
- The proposed amendment claims to add to this list "forest and wildlife training infrastructure" and the "establishment of zoos and safaris" managed by the government or any authority under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- It may also add ecotourism facilities approved under the Forest Working Plan or Working Scheme approved by the central government.

(6) States may grant forest clearance for strategic / security projects

- The proposed Section 2A may empower the central government to provide for state government approval for projects on forest land for "strategic" or security projects of "national importance", according to the documents accessed.
- There is no clarity on the scope of these terms, or on the determination of national importance, or illustrative examples of such projects.

Limiting the coverage of the Supreme Court's decision

- The Supreme Court in Godavarman Case 1996 had held that the meaning of "forest" under the FCA would include not only statutorily recognised forests.
- It would include any area recorded as forest in government records, regardless of ownership.
- The restrictions in the FCA would, therefore, be applicable to both de jure and de facto

The proposed amendment purportedly seeks to reduce the scope of this judgment by limiting the applicability of the FCA to only such land that has been:

- Declared or notified as forest under the Indian Forest Act, 1927
- Recorded as forest land in the government record prior to 25 October 1980, with the exception of such land if its use has been changed from forest to non-forest purpose prior to 12 December 1996
- Identified as "forest" by a state government expert committee up to one year from the date of the amendment.

The judgment interpreted the Act as it stood then. The addition of a specific definition thus limits the scope of the judgment. De facto forests are, therefore, excluded from the purview of the FCA.

Creation of 'No-Go' areas

- The proposed amendment inserts a new Section 2B, which will allow the central government to delineate forest areas where conversion to specific non-forest uses would not be permitted for a fixed period of time.
- The delineation would be based on the basis of pre-defined criteria.
- This could mean, for instance, that a certain dense forest would not be allowed to be converted to a coal mine for the next 30 years, but it could be allowed to be cleared for a thermal power plant.
- In the Godavarman case, the Supreme Court had directed states to set up expert committees to draw up a list of forests that were not notified under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), but deserved to be protected by the FCA.
- Several states are yet to comply with this requirement.

Impact

- The proposed Section 1A(ii) excludes from the purview of the FCA those forests which were described as such in government records (but not notified under the IFA).
- The Karnataka High Court recently dealt with a matter wherein the state government had passed several orders to de-notify lands classified as "state forest" (but not notified under IFA), and to divert them for non-forest purposes.
- The lands were then allotted for the rehabilitation of displaced people. The state government completed this process of dereservation of reserved forests in 2017.
- On March 4, 2021, the high court struck down actions of the state government for not taking "prior approval of the central government" as required under Section 2 of the FCA.

- It recommended criminal action against any officers responsible for allowing non-forest use of forest land.

What lies ahead?

- If the proposed amendment is enacted, the insertion of Section 1A(ii) would exempt the application of the FCA to the land which was converted to non-forest use by the Karnataka government.
- The exemption of zoos and safaris from "non-forest purpose" comes a year after the government proposed to open a zoo in Mumbai's Aarey forest and a tiger safari in Madhya Pradesh led to objections from biologists.
- While state governments may certainly continue to seek dilution of the FCA during enforcement, the removal of the requirement of central government approval is a step towards a dilution of restrictions on forest land use.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to *Zabarwan Hills*

1. It is a sub-mountain range between Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan Range.
2. Asia's largest Tulip Garden is located at the foothills of Zaberwan range.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

- Asia's largest Tulip Garden was recently opened in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The tulip garden is located at the foothills of Zaberwan range with an overview of Dal Lake.

Zabarwan Range

- It is a sub-mountain range between Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan Range in the central part of the Kashmir Valley in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in India.

2. Consider the following statements regarding the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):

1. The PRIs are constituted as per Article 244 of the Indian Constitution.
2. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution provided Constitutional status to the PRIs.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- The Panchayats are included in **Article 40** under the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
  - Article 244(2) and 275(1) of the constitution provides for the **administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** to safeguard the rights of the tribal population in these states.
- In 1992, the Government of India introduced the **73rd Amendment** to make the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) Constitutional machinery. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
  - The amendment also vested power in the State Government to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of **self-government** such as:
    - Preparation of plans and their execution for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects listed in the XI schedule of the Constitution.
    - To levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. Transfer of taxes, duties, tolls and fees collected by the States to Panchayats.

3. With reference to Institution of Lokpal, consider the following statements:

1. Institution of Lokpal is a constitutional body.
2. The Lokpal has jurisdiction over Ministers even in the matter of anything said in Parliament.

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 **Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013** provided for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States.
  - Thus, the institution of Lokpal is a **statutory body** without any constitutional status. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- **Jurisdiction of Lokpal** includes Prime Minister, Ministers, members of Parliament, Groups A, B, C and D officers and officials of Central Government.
  - However, the jurisdiction of the Lokpal included the Prime Minister except on allegations of corruption relating to international relations, security, the public order, atomic energy and space.
  - The Lokpal **does not have jurisdiction over Ministers and MPs in the matter of anything said in Parliament** or a vote given there. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

4. With reference to the Shigmo festivities, consider the following statements:

1. It is the celebration of a rich, golden harvest of paddy by the tribal communities of Goa.
2. Ghode Modni is a dance form performed during this festival.

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

- Shigmo is the celebration of a **'rich, golden harvest of paddy'** by the tribal communities of Goa. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
    - Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.
- Two Variants of the Festival:
    - Dhakto Shigmo: It is celebrated by the rural population, farmers and the labour class.
    - Vhadlo Shigmo: It is of greater importance and is celebrated by everyone.
- Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.
    - The festival begins with 'Naman' that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village 'maand' or the village stage to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.
        - It is called the 'romta mell' that moves from one village to another.
        - **Folk dances** like **Ghode Modni** (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi are performed during this festival. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
    - Shigmo is celebrated all over India but in different names:
        - North India - Holi.
        - Assam and Bengal - Dolyatra.
        - South India - Kamadahan.
        - Maharashtra - Shimga

5. **Satkosia Tiger Reserve is located in which of the following states?**

- a. Madhya Pradesh
- b. Chhattisgarh
- c. Maharashtra
- d. Odisha

Answer : d

Satkosia Tiger Reserve

- Satkosia Tiger Reserve is located where the Mahanadi River passes through a 22 km long gorge in the Eastern Ghats mountains.
- It was designated in 2007, and comprises the Satkosia Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary and the adjacent Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The tiger reserve is located in the Eastern Highlands moist deciduous forests ecoregion.
- It has no Tiger population at present for which India's first Interstate tiger relocation project under National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was carried out here.
- NTCA had approved the transfer of six tigers from the wild of Madhya Pradesh's Kanha National Park to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha, but has suspended the tiger translocation project pending a detailed review.
- The decision was taken after the first big cat, a male Royal Bengal tiger that had been translocated from Kanha tiger reserve in MP to Satkosia, was found dead in core area of the forest.

6. **Tsugaru Strait is a strait connecting which of the following?**

- a. East China Sea and Yellow Sea
- b. Sea of Japan and Pacific Ocean
- c. Sea of Okhotsk and Berring Sea
- d. South China Sea and Philipine Sea

Answer : b

- North Korea has recently fired two ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan.
- Japan, however said, no debris has fallen within its territorial waters.
- The test comes after few days after North Korea reportedly fired two non-ballistic missiles into the Yellow Sea.
- Meanwhile UN Security Council resolutions have already banned North Korea from testing ballistic missiles which are considered threatening weapons.
- *Tsugaru Strait* connects the Sea of Japan with North Pacific Ocean.

Mains Practice Questions

1. "Fundamental duties are not made enforceable by a writ of court like the fundamental rights, but they are fundamental to the well being of society and individuals." Examine. (250 words)

Approach

- Explain fundamental duties establishing their relationship between the fundamental rights.
- Write arguments for and against whether the fundamental duties should be made enforceable.
- Substantiate your arguments with some of the examples where fundamental duties have been the basis for legislative and executive actions.
- Write a conclusion based on the assessment of the premises of your arguments.

2. Peasant movements of the twentieth century in India were deeply influenced by the ongoing struggle for national freedom. Discuss the important features of these movements. (150 Words)

Approach

- Briefly explain the change in the characteristics of peasant movements in the 20th century as compared to earlier peasant movements.
- Discuss the features of peasant movements with respect to the development of national freedom struggle.
- Discuss the role of national leaders in the formation of peasant organisation and their influence on peasant movements.
- Highlight the nature of important peasant movements in twentieth-century across India.
- Conclude the answer by summarising the overall influence of the peasant movement.