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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. 'Move health to Concurrent list'

Context:

Fifteenth Finance Commission's Chairman's address at the NATHEALTH summit.

Suggestions:

Healthcare to be shifted to Concurrent List:

- Chairman of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, N.K. Singh asserted that Health should be shifted to the Concurrent list under the Constitution.
 - He opined that bringing health into the Concurrent list would give the Centre greater flexibility to enact regulatory changes and reinforce the obligation of all stakeholders towards providing better healthcare.

Set up developmental finance institution (DFI) dedicated to healthcare:

- He suggested that a DFI dedicated to healthcare investments be set up.
 - DFI would increase healthcare access in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and also come in with technical assistance that ensures proper usage of funds, he said.

Enhance government spending on health:

- He made a case for increasing the government's spending on health to 2.5% of GDP by 2025.
- He said primary healthcare should be a fundamental commitment of all States in particular and should be allocated at least two-thirds of such spending.

Universalising healthcare insurance:

- He emphasised the importance of universalising healthcare insurance as a large section of the society still remained uncovered.

- While the PMJAY covers the bottom two income quintiles, commercial insurance largely covers the top-income quintile, thereby creating a missing middle class.
- This refers to people in the middle two income quintiles, where the population is not rich enough to afford commercial insurance and not poor enough to be covered under government-sponsored health insurance schemes.

2. 40% of RTI rejections did not cite valid reason, says analysis

Context:

Central Information Commission's annual report on Right to Information (RTI) requests.

Details:

- The CIC's annual report covers more than 2,000 public authorities across the Central government as well as the union territories.
- An analysis of CIC macro-data from Central ministries shows that the Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received. The Agriculture Ministry's rejection rate doubled from 2% in 2018-19 to 4% in 2019-20. The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.
- The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate.
- However, almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act.
 - This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office.
- In 38.7% of rejections in 2019-20, public authorities failed to cite permissible exemption clauses, and were classified under the 'Others' category in the CIC data. This is an increase from the 33% seen the previous year.

RTI Act:

- The Right To Information Act is one of the most important acts which empowers ordinary citizens to question the government and its working.
 - This has been widely used by citizens and media to uncover corruption, progress in government work, expenses related information, etc.
- The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information that would endanger life and safety to

that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign governments, copyrights, or sovereignty, security and intelligence matters.

- Public authorities are expected to cite the relevant clause of the Act to invoke the exemption.

3. Japan to fund A&N, metro expansion

Context:

In the first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N), Japan has approved grant aid worth ₹265 crore, to improve the power supply in the islands.

Details:

- This is the first-ever ODA project in the strategic islands of Andaman & Nicobar (apart from humanitarian emergency assistance).
- While approving the grant, Japan stressed the strategic geopolitical location of the islands for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
 - India is key to the Quad and the Indo-Pacific region.
- Cooperation between Japan and India on these crucial islands demonstrate the commitment of both countries to realising a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- The grant would be used to procure 15MWh batteries as well as power system stabilisers to allow better utilisation of solar power generated in South Andaman.

Note:

- Japan has also extended yen loans worth ₹16,186 crore, for executing four projects, including Delhi Metro's Phase 4 and Bengaluru Metro's Phase 2 expansion plans.
- Loan agreements have been signed between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the government.
- A loan of 807 crore was extended for crop diversification in Himachal Pradesh and 3,272 crore in loans to rural water supply with a focus on mitigating fluorosis in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu and Barmer districts.

4. Poll bond sale can go ahead: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds prior to the Assembly elections in crucial states such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Details:

- A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, said the scheme began in 2018 and continued in 2019 and 2020 without any impediments.
- It said that the court found no reason to stall the sale of the electoral bonds.

Charges against Electoral Bonds and SC's Response:

- The anonymity of the buyers – The scheme provides anonymity but ensures that everything happens through the banking channels alone.
 - They can also be obtained in physical form from the Registrar of Companies upon payment of a prescribed fee.
 - Since the scheme mandates political parties to file an audited statement of accounts and also since the Companies Act requires financial statements of registered companies to be filed with the Registrar of Companies, the purchase as well as encashment of the bonds, happening only through banking channels, is always reflected in documents that eventually come to the public domain.
- Corporate houses can finance political parties – The court rubbished the charge of electoral bonds facilitating anonymous and hefty donations from corporate houses to political parties. Anyone buying bonds will have to fulfil KYC norms. The money spent will reflect on the expenses sheet of the company.
- Foreign corporate houses can buy bonds and influence electoral politics – The court debunked fears that electoral bonds would help foreign corporate houses influence domestic electoral politics. Bonds can be purchased only by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.
- Bonds bought with white money can be re-purchased with black money – Bonds are not tradable under clause 14. Moreover, the first buyer will not stand to gain anything out of such a sale except losing white money for the black.

5. Dormant Parliament, fading business

Context:

The 2021 Budget session of Parliament ended two weeks ahead of the original plan.

Concerns:

Trend of the last few sessions:

- The Budget session of 2020 was curtailed ahead of the lockdown imposed following the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- A short 18-day monsoon session ended after 10 days as several Members of Parliament and Parliament staff got affected by COVID-19.
- The winter session was cancelled.
- The fiscal year 2020-21 saw the Lok Sabha sitting for 34 days (and the Rajya Sabha for 33), the lowest ever.
- The casualty was proper legislative scrutiny of proposed legislation as well as government functioning and finances.
- Parliament could have adopted remote working and technological solutions, as several other countries did.

No Bill scrutiny:

- Many high impact Bills were introduced and passed within a few days.
 - The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which is the Bill to change the governance mechanism of Delhi – shifting governance from the legislature and the Chief Minister to the Lieutenant Governor was passed by both houses.
 - Another Bill, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021, which amends the Mines and Minerals Act, 1957 to remove end-use restrictions on mines and ease conditions for captive mines, was also passed by both houses.
 - The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021 – to create a new government infrastructure finance institution and permit private ones in this sector was passed within three days of introduction.
 - The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Bill to increase the limit of foreign direct investment in insurance companies from 49% to 74% also took just a week between introduction and passing by both Houses.
- An important development of this session has been the absence of careful scrutiny of Bills.
- During the session, 13 Bills were introduced, and not even one of them was referred to a parliamentary committee for examination.
- In all, 13 Bills were introduced in this session, and eight of them were passed within the session.
- This quick work would be seen as avoidance of Parliament's duty to scrutinise Bills and certainly not as a sign of efficiency.

Consulting House panels:

- The percentage of Bills referred to committees declined from 60% and 71% in the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-09) and the 15th Lok Sabha, respectively, to 27% in the 16th Lok Sabha and just 11% in the current one.
- This development also highlights the decline in the efficacy of committees.
- Parliamentary committees have often done a stellar job.
 - The committee that examined the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code suggested many changes to make the Code work better, and which were all incorporated in the final law.
 - Similarly, amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act were based on the recommendations of the Committee.

Money Bill classification:

- The Finance Bill has made major amendments to the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956.
 - As this is a Money Bill, the Rajya Sabha cannot make any amendments, and has only recommendatory powers.
- The last few years have seen the dubious practice of marking Bills as 'Money Bills' and getting them past the Rajya Sabha.
- Some sections of the Aadhaar Act were read down by the Supreme Court of India due to this procedure.
 - However, with a dissenting opinion that said that the entire Act should be invalidated.
- The Finance Bills, over the last few years, have contained several unconnected items such as restructuring of tribunals, the introduction of electoral bonds, and amendments to the foreign contribution act.
- It would be useful if the Court can give a clear interpretation of the definition of Money Bills and provide guide rails within which Bills have to stay to be termed as such.

Budget passed without elaborate discussion:

- During this session, the Union Budget was presented, discussed and passed.
- The Lok Sabha had listed the budget of just five Ministries for detailed discussion and discussed only three of these; 76% of the total Budget was approved without any discussion.
- This behaviour was in line with the trend of the last 15 years, during which period 70% to 100% of the Budget have been passed without discussion in most years.
- The Constitution requires the Lok Sabha to approve the expenditure Budget (in the form of demand for grants) of each department and Ministry.

The missing Deputy Speaker:

- A striking feature of the current Lok Sabha is the absence of a Deputy Speaker. By the time of the next session of Parliament, two years would have elapsed without the election of a Deputy Speaker.
- Article 93 of the Constitution states that "... The House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker...."
- Usually, the Deputy Speaker is elected within a couple of months of the formation of a new Lok Sabha.
- The issue showed up starkly this session when the Speaker was hospitalised. Some functions of the Speaker such as delivering the valedictory speech were carried out by a senior member.

Conclusion:

- The deterioration in Parliament's functioning is not a recent phenomenon.
- While over the last few years most Bills have been discussed in the House and have had less disruptions, the scrutiny of Bills has suffered as they are not being referred to committees.
- Parliament has a central role in our democracy as the representative body that checks the work of the government.
- It is also expected to examine all legislative proposals in detail, understand their nuances and implications of the provisions, and decide on the appropriate way forward.
- In order to fulfil its constitutional mandate, it is imperative that Parliament functions effectively.
- This will require making and following processes such as creating a system of research support to Members of Parliament, providing sufficient time for MPs to examine issues, and requiring that all Bills and budgets are examined by committees and public feedback is taken.
- In sum, Parliament needs to ensure sufficient scrutiny over the proposals and actions of the government.

6. Eritrea will pull out troops from Tigray: Ethiopian PM

Context:

Eritrea will pull its troops out of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said.

Background:

- Abiy sent troops into Tigray in November 2020 after accusing the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), of attacks on Army camps.
 - TPLF was previously a dominant ruling party in the region.

Details:

- The recent announcement is a potential breakthrough in a drawn-out conflict that has seen atrocities carried out against civilians.
- It comes as Mr. Abiy (winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize) faces mounting pressure to end fighting.
 - Both Eritrean and Ethiopian troops stand accused of abuses, including mass killings and rapes.

Note:

- Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a border war beginning in 1998.
- The war left tens of thousands dead and resulted in a two-decade stalemate.
- Abiy won his Nobel in large part for initiating a rapprochement with Mr. Afwerki after taking office in 2018, but Eritrea and the TPLF remained bitter enemies.
 - Isaias Afwerki is an Eritrean politician who has been the first and current President of Eritrea since the country's independence in 1993.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. India, Pak. hold brigade commander-level meet

What's in News?

A brigade commander-level meeting between the Indian and the Pakistani armies was held in J&K's Poonch district.

- The meeting comes amid a complete peace maintained by the two armies along the Line of Control (LoC).
- It is the first such meet since the joint statement by the two countries reaffirming their commitment to abide by the 2003 ceasefire agreement.

8. What to consider before India takes 'net-zero' pledge

About net-zero emission targets

- The “net zero” idea is inspired by an **IPCC report** that calls for **global net emissions** – GHG emissions minus **removal of GHGs** through various means to reach zero by mid-century.
- This builds on a clause in the Paris Climate Agreement, calling for a **balance between sources and sinks of emissions** by the second half of the century.
- It is worth underscoring that none of this implies that each country has to reach net-zero by 2050.
- Net-zero announcements signals a progressive direction of travel and has the apparent merit of presenting a simple and singular benchmark for assessing the performance of a country.

3 Issues with net zero targets

- First, it potentially allows countries to **keep emitting today** while relying on yet-to-be-developed and costly technologies to absorb emissions tomorrow.
- Second, its focus on long-term targets **displaces attention from meaningful short-term actions** that are credible and accountable.
- Third., it calls into question **concerns of equity and fairness**.

Balancing the concerns of developing and developed countries

- The Paris Agreement, while urging global peaking as soon as possible, explicitly recognises that **peaking will take longer for developing countries**.
- The Paris Agreement calls for achieving balance in developing and developed nation **“on the basis of equity”** and in the context of “sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty”.
- Therefore, the Paris Agreement **does not advocate uptake of net-zero targets** across developed and developing countries, as currently being advocated by many countries.
- Rather, the emphasis in the **agreement on equity, sustainable development and poverty eradication** suggests a thoughtful balancing of responsibilities between developed and developing countries.

Factors India should consider before taking zero-emission target

- Our first nationally determined contribution (NDC) submitted under the Paris Agreement has been rated by observers as **compatible with a 2 degrees Celsius trajectory**.
- We are ahead of schedule in meeting our contribution.

- Now, India will need to decide whether to join a growing number of countries (**over 120 at last count**) that have pledged to reach “net zero” emissions by 2050.
- But it is not clear that enhancing mitigation action can definitively deliver net-zero emissions by 2050, **given that our emissions are still rising**, and our **development needs are considerable**.
- There is a possibility that a not fully thought-through mid-century net-zero target **would compromise sustainable development**.
- Moreover, such a major shift in our negotiating position will have implications for the future, including our ability to leverage **additional finance and technology** to help shift to low-carbon development pathways.
- Our 2 degrees Celsius compatible NDC, bolstered by the Prime Minister’s announcement in 2019 that we would achieve 450 GW of renewables by 2030, could be strengthened.
- Building on this track record suggests an **alternate and equally, if not more, compelling, way to indicate climate ambition** in the future than uncritically taking on a net-zero target.

Way forward

- We would benefit from taking stock of our actions and **focusing on near-term transitions**.
- This will allow us to meet and even over-comply with our 2030 target while also ensuring concomitant developmental benefits, such as developing a **vibrant renewable industry**.
- We can start putting in place the policies and institutions necessary to move us in **the right direction for the longer-term** and also better understand the implications of net-zero scenarios before making a net-zero pledge.
- It would also be in India’s interest to link any future pledge to the **achievement of near-term action by industrialised countries**.
- That would be fair and consistent with the principles of the UNFCCC.

Conclusion

India, like others, have a responsibility to the international community, we also have a responsibility to our citizens to be deliberate and thoughtful about a decision as consequential as India’s climate pledge.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Lachit Borphukan:

Context:

In the run-up to the polls in Assam, the name of **Ahom general Lachit Borphukan**, credited with defeating the Mughals in the Battle of Saraighat (1671), has been frequently invoked.

Who was Lachit Borphukan?

- He was a **commander in the Ahom kingdom**.
- Known for his leadership in the **1671 Battle of Saraighat** that thwarted a drawn-out attempt by Mughal forces under the command of Ramsingh I to take over Ahom kingdom.
- The **battle of Saraighat** was fought on the banks of the Brahmaputra in Guwahati.
- The **National Defence Academy (NDA)**, ever since 1999 has been conferring the best passing out cadet with the **Lachit Borphukan gold medal**.

Background:

During the last phase of the **Battle of Saraighat**, when the Mughals attacked the Assamese forces through the river in Saraighat, many Assamese soldiers began losing their will to fight. It was Lachit's clarion call to all the soldiers that made them fight till their last breath, ultimately resulting in the defeat of the Mughals.

2. How the electoral bonds scheme has worked so far, and why it has been challenged in SC?

Context:

The Supreme Court has dismissed petitions seeking to stay the sale of fresh electoral bonds ahead of Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry.

- Although the court said there is no justification to stay the current sale, the larger constitutional challenge to the electoral bonds scheme filed in 2017 is still pending.

What is the pending challenge?

Apart from challenging **the constitutionality of the electoral bonds scheme**, the petitioners had asked the court to **declare all political parties as public offices to bring them under the ambit of the Right to Information Act and compel political parties to disclose their income and expenditure.**

What are electoral bonds?

- Announced in the 2017 Union Budget, electoral bonds are **interest-free bearer instruments used to donate money anonymously to political parties.**
- A bearer instrument **does not carry any information about the buyer or payee.**
- **The holder of the instrument** (which is the political party) is presumed to be its owner.
- The bonds are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore, and State Bank of India is the only bank authorised to sell them.
- Donors can buy and subsequently donate bonds to a political party, which can encash the bonds through its verified account within 15 days.
- There is **no limit on the number of bonds an individual or company can purchase.**
- If a party hasn't encashed any bonds within 15 days, SBI deposits these into **the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.**

Why have they been challenged?

- The printing of these bonds & SBI commission for facilitating the sale and purchase of the bonds is paid from the taxpayers' money by the central government.
- Anonymity provided to donors of electoral bonds.
- Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the Centre has exempted parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds.

According to transparency activists, these infringe **the citizen's 'Right to Know' and make the political class even more unaccountable.**

What is the EC's stand?

The EC had **objected to amendments in the Representation of the People Act that exempt political parties from disclosing donations** through this route.

- In a situation where the contribution received through electoral bonds are not reported, on perusal of the contribution report of political parties, it cannot be

ascertained whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provision under **Section 29(b) of the RP Act** which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources.

3. The Bihar police Bill:

Context:

The Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021 was passed recently amid protests by the Opposition.

- The Bill is aimed at boosting security, and will have limited scope as it is applicable only to certain specified areas.

Aim of the Bill:

It “aims to develop the Bihar Military Police into a well-trained and fully equipped armed police force with multi-domain expertise to cater to the development needs and the larger interest of the state.

Key Provisions:

1. Renames the Bihar Military Police as the Bihar Special Armed Police, and gives the force more teeth, on the lines of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), so it can better secure the commercial and industrial assets of the state.
2. The mandate of the force will be the “maintenance of public order, combating extremism, ensuring the better protection and security of specified establishments in such manner as may be notified and perform such other duties, as may be notified.”
3. Empowers Special Armed Police officers to carry out searches and arrests without warrant.
4. Courts can take cognizance of certain offences by the officers only after government sanction.

Need for:

Over the past decade, the state’s dependence on Central forces has grown, and an organised armed police force of its own will save government expenses and create more jobs for locals.

Issues and concerns associated:

- The bill gives absolute powers to the police personnel in some cases.

- Section 15 of the Act says a court cannot take cognisance if a special armed police officer is involved in a serious case barring some exceptions.
- The government says the Bill is applicable only to certain areas. But it has not specified which areas, nor has it said on what basis would these locations be notified.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4. Early bud-break genes and climate change

Changing climate has transformed the time spring unfolds in front of us.

Early bud-break

- Bud-break – which is when trees leaf out – has undergone a change.
- Several trees initiate bud-break too early or too late, which affects the harvest.
- Spring, for example, arrived earlier than usual in Kashmir this year due to higher temperatures in February and March.
- Gul-tour, a spring-flowering herb started blooming in mid-February in Kashmir. Its yellow flowers would usually blossom in March, heralding Spring.

What causes early bud-break?

- This is why understanding the genetics of bud-break helps scientists modify or select crop varieties that can be more resilient to the climate threat.
- The properties of transcription factors are genes that regulate other genes by binding to deoxyribonucleic acid and giving activation instructions.
- It helps scientists determine what other genes might be involved in a process such as a bud-break.

EBB genes

- Researchers of the study had earlier identified transcription factors for early bud-break 1 (EBB1) and short vegetative phase (SVL), which directly interact to control bud-break.
- EBB1 is a positive regulator of bud-break, whereas SVL is a negative regulator of bud-break.
- Now, the research team has identified and characterized the early bud-break 3 (EBB3) gene.

Identified mechanism of Bud-break

- EBB3 is a temperature-responsive, positive regulator of bud-break that provides a direct link to activation of the cell cycle during bud-break.
- EBB3 provides a direct link through the signalling pathway for how these cells divide.
- The analysis reveals how particular genes activate through the season or in response to specific environmental factors.

Significance of the study

- New approaches for accelerated tree adaptation to climate change helps ensure bud-break happens at the right time each spring.
- Using their understanding of the genetic pathways that control bud-break, scientists hope to genetically modify crops to adapt to warmer winters and unpredictable frosts.

5. Places in news: Chilika Lake

The Chilika Lake in Odisha, Asia's largest brackish water lake, was once part of the Bay of Bengal, a study by the marine archaeology department of the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa, has found.

Chilika Lake

- Chilika Lake is a brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha.
- It is located at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal, covering an area of over 1,100 km².
- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the largest brackish water lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef.
- It has been listed Ramsar Site as well as a tentative UNESCO World Heritage site.

Its formation

- The process of the formation of the Chilika might have begun in the latter part of the Pleistocene epoch, around 20,000 years ago.
- India's peninsular river Mahanadi carried a heavy load of silt and dumped part of it at its delta.
- As the sediment-laden river met the Bay of Bengal, sand bars were formed near its mouth.

- These created a backflow of the seawater into the sluggish fresh water at the estuary, resulting in the huge brackish water lake.
- Marine archaeological studies on the Odisha coast clearly show that the Chilika once acted as a safe harbour for cargo ships bound for Southeast Asia and other parts of the world.

Historical accounts on Chilika

The lake has been a useful centre for maritime activities since the third millennium before the Common Era (CE).

- Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy (150 CE) described Palur as an important port of Kalinga and referred to it as 'Paloura'.
- This port was situated close to the 'point of departure' located outside the southern tip of the lake at Kantiagarh, from where ships used to sail directly for Southeast Asia.
- Stone anchors and hero stones from Manikapatna, Palur and the adjoining onshore regions of the Chilika suggest that the present brackish water lagoon was in fact a part of the Bay of Bengal.
- Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (7th century CE) recorded 'Che-li-ta-lo-Ching' as a flourishing port.
- This port was located at Chhatargarh on the banks of the Chilika.
- The Brahmanda Purana (10th century CE approximately) says the Chilika was an important centre of trade and commerce, with ships sailing to Java, Malaya and Ceylon.
- The famous Sanskrit poet Kalidas called the king of Kalinga 'Madhodhipati' or 'Lord of the Ocean'.

6. What is NISAR, the joint Earth-Observing mission of NASA and ISRO?

Context:

NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite called NISAR.

About NISAR:

- The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, India, into a near-polar orbit.

- It will scan the globe every 12 days over the course of its three-year mission of imaging the Earth's land, ice sheets and sea ice to give an "unprecedented" view of the planet.
- It will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.
- NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.
- ISRO will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.
- NISAR will be equipped with the largest reflector antenna ever launched by NASA and its primary goals include tracking subtle changes in the Earth's surface, spotting warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions, helping to monitor groundwater supplies and tracking the rate at which ice sheets are melting.

Synthetic aperture radar:

The name **NISAR** is short for **NASA-ISRO-SAR**. SAR here refers to **the synthetic aperture radar** that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth.

- Essentially, SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images. Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness, which means that it can collect data day and night in any weather.

7. Why Centre wants cryptocurrency holdings mandatorily disclosed in RoC filings?

Context:

The corporate affairs ministry has announced **companies will have to disclose any holding or dealings in cryptocurrencies or virtual currencies in their financial statements filed with the Registrar of Companies.**

What does this inclusion indicate?

This is a major step towards regulating the crypto assets in India and will bring in a lot of transparency in reporting/filing of crypto investments. So far, the government was planning to ban them.

What are Cryptocurrencies?

Cryptocurrencies are digital currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Arrange the following from North to South:

1. Spratly Islands
2. Paracel Islands
3. Scarborough Shoal
4. Riau Islands

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

North to South: Paracel Islands – Scarborough Shoal – Spratly Islands – Riau Islands

2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) is appointed by the President under Article 124 of the Constitution.

2. The appointment of CJI is done on the recommendation of the Supreme Court collegium.

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 Chief Justice of India and the Judges of the Supreme Court (SC) are appointed by the President under clause (2) of **Article 124 of the Constitution. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- As far as the CJI is concerned, the **outgoing CJI recommends his successor.**
 - The Union Law Minister forwards the recommendation to the Prime Minister who, in turn, advises the President.
- SC in the Second Judges Case (1993), ruled that the **senior most judge of the Supreme Court** should alone be appointed to the office of the CJI. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- The Supreme Court collegium is headed by the Chief Justice of India and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.
 - The collegium system is the system of appointment and transfer of judges that has evolved through judgments of the Supreme Court (Judges Cases), and not by an Act of Parliament or by a provision of the Constitution.

3. With reference to the 'Electoral Bonds', consider the following statements:

1. It is a financial instrument for making donations to political parties.
2. State Bank of India is authorised to issue and encash these bonds.

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

- Electoral Bond is a financial instrument for making donations to political parties. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The bonds are issued in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore without any maximum limit.
- **State Bank of India is authorised to issue and encash** these bonds, which are valid for fifteen days from the date of issuance. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- These bonds are redeemable in the designated account of a registered political party.
- The bonds are available for purchase by any person (who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India) for a period of ten days each in the months of January, April, July and October as may be specified by the Central Government.
 - A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
 - Donor's name is not mentioned on the bond.

4. Consider the following statements about Helium:

1. It is a monatomic gas with the lowest boiling point as compared to all other elements.
2. The Rajmahal volcanic basin is the storehouse of Helium in India.
3. Qatar is the largest exporter of Helium in the world.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- Helium is a colourless, odourless, tasteless, non-toxic, inert, **monatomic gas**, the first in the noble gas group in the periodic table.
 - Its **boiling point is the lowest** among all the elements. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

- Helium was discovered in the gaseous atmosphere surrounding the Sun in the year 1868.
- In India it was first discovered in 1906 by an Englishman Morris Travers in Kerala.
 - **India's Rajmahal volcanic basin in Jharkhand** is the storehouse of helium trapped for billions of years, since the very birth of Earth from the Sun. **hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The **USA became the most important exporter of helium** across the world after the discovery of helium in large quantities under the American Great Plains.
 - It was soon realized that the USA was also the biggest storehouse of helium.
 - Qatar is a possible exporter but acute political and diplomatic wrangles have made Qatar unreliable. **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

5. With reference to Net-Zero Emissions, consider the following statements:

1. It refers to achieving zero net carbon emission in the atmosphere.
2. India has committed to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

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

- 'Net zero emissions' refers to **achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- There is global pressure on India to commit net-zero emissions by 2050. However **India has not yet committed to it. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

6. With reference to the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID), consider the following statements:

1. It will organise and facilitate foreign participation in infrastructure projects.
2. NBFID may raise money in the form of loans in both Indian rupees and foreign currencies.

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

- Recently, the Rajya Sabha cleared the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) Bill, 2021.
- The Bill seeks to establish the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) as the principal Development Financial Institution (DFIs) for infrastructure financing.
- NBFID was announced in the Budget 2021.
- Functions of NBFID:
 - Extending loans and advances for infrastructure projects.
 - Taking over or refinancing such existing loans.
 - Attracting investment from private sector investors and institutional investors for infrastructure projects.
 - **Organising and facilitating foreign participation in infrastructure projects. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - Facilitating negotiations with various government authorities for dispute resolution in the field of infrastructure financing.
 - Providing consultancy services in infrastructure financing.
- Source of Funds:
 - **It may raise money in the form of loans or otherwise both in Indian rupees and foreign currencies**, or secure money by the issue and sale of various financial instruments including bonds and debentures. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - It may borrow money from the central government, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), scheduled commercial banks, mutual funds, and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

- Initially, the central government will own 100% shares of the institution which may subsequently be reduced up to 26%.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the value-added, income and expenditure methods of estimating national income.

Approach:

- Briefly explain the concept of national income.
- Explain the value added, income and expenditure methods of estimating national income.
- Conclude with a brief note on the methods employed in India.

2. Agricultural marketing in India suffers from various shortcomings. Explain. Highlight the measures taken by the government to improve the agricultural marketing system in India.

Approach:

- Start with a brief note on agricultural marketing.
- Explain the various shortcomings of agricultural marketing in India.
- Highlight the measures taken by the government to improve the agricultural marketing system in India.
- Conclude briefly by mentioning the further measures needed.

