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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. A missing science pillar in the COVID response

Context

- The rising trajectory of daily new Covid-19 cases.

Reasons why coronavirus cases are rising

1. Mutations

- The evolution of coronavirus is among the major reasons for the second wave. Scientists have detected numerous mutations in the SARS-CoV-2.
- A resumption of global travel meant that spread of variants into India was inevitable.

2. Increased Testing

- Increased testing is another reason why India is detecting more cases in the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The sero-surveys have shown that India had greater Covid-19 exposure than revealed through confirmed cases of coronavirus infection on the basis of laboratory tests.

3. Multiple super spreader events happening in schools, colleges, offices, public transport.

- From attending large weddings and crowded public functions to heedless crowding in malls and marketplaces, the general public has been quite lax about adhering to basic safety protocols.

Way Forward

India needs to increase the quantity, quality and public availability of actual data to guide decision-making.

- **First**, collection of anonymized demographic (patient information) and risk details (age, sex, travel history, contact with other COVID-19 patients,

existing chronic conditions, current smoking) on all positive cases on a central website in each State remains a priority.

- **Second**, greatly expanded sequencing of the viral genome is the need.
 - Genome sequences play a critical role in our understanding of viral evolution, disease epidemiology, surveillance, diagnosis, and countermeasure development.
 - It can be achieved by re-programming sequencing capacity in Indian academic and commercial laboratories.
- **Third**, far better reporting of COVID-19 deaths is needed.
 - Daily or weekly reporting of the total death counts by age and sex by each municipality would help track if there is a spike in presumed COVID-19 deaths.
- **Fourth**, the Indian Council of Medical Research's national serosurvey had design limitations such that it probably underestimated the true national prevalence.
 - A far larger and better set of serial surveys is required.
- **Fifth**, the rich, influential and urban classes, are receiving their vaccination on time but the poor and the rural masses are left far behind.
 - Vaccination campaigns need to reach the poor adults over age 45, without having to prove anything other than approximate age.
 - Follow-up studies among the vaccinated can establish the durability of protection, and, ideally, reduction in transmission.
- **Sixth**, we need to understand better why some populations are not affected.
 - For example, COVID-19 infection and death levels in Thailand and Vietnam are remarkably low, and cannot be assigned to their stronger testing and tracing programmes.
 - Widespread existing immunity, perhaps from direct exposure to bat coronaviruses might be one explanation.
 - Rapidly assembled comparative studies across parts of India and Asia are a priority.
- **Finally**, the government can formulate an adult vaccination plan.
 - COVID-19 could well turn into a seasonal challenge and thus, the central government should actively consider launching a national adult vaccination programme that matches India's commitment and success in expanding universal childhood vaccination.
 - Adult and child vaccination programmes are essential to prepare for future pandemics.

Conclusion

- The resurgence of COVID-19 presents a major challenge for governments.

- Therefore, it should expand the epidemiological evidence, share it with the public and build confidence that the vaccination programme will benefit all Indians.

2. Maternal deaths rose during pandemic: study

Context:

According to a study, maternal deaths have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to avoidable deaths of both mothers and babies.
- COVID-19 impact on pregnancy outcomes was disproportionately high in poorer countries.
- The failure of the health system to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in maternal deaths and stillbirths.
 - There was a 28% increase in the odds of stillbirth.
 - The risk of mothers dying during pregnancy or childbirth increased by about one-third.
 - There was also a rise in maternal depression.

Way Forward:

- Policymakers and healthcare leaders must urgently investigate robust strategies for preserving safe and respectful maternity care, given the ongoing global emergency.
- Immediate action is required to avoid rolling back decades of investment in reducing mother and infant mortality in low-resource settings.
- Given the fact that the pandemic resulted in reduced access to care, personnel for maternity services must not be redeployed for other critical and medical care during the pandemic.

3. Disquiet over policy for rare diseases

Context:

Caregivers to patients with 'rare diseases' and affiliated organisations are dissatisfied with the National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021.

Rare Disease:

- A rare disease is a health condition of particularly low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases.
- Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia, primary immunodeficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain types of muscular dystrophies are the most common types of rare diseases recorded in India.

National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021:

- The National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021 was notified on the 31st of March 2021.
- The policy comes over three years after the health ministry formulated a National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases in July 2017 but kept it in abeyance.
- India plans to create a national registry for a database on rare diseases, classify known rare diseases in three groups.
- In the new policy, 'rare diseases' have not been defined but classified into three groups based on expert opinion.
 - Group 1 has disorders controllable by one-time curative treatment, including osteopetrosis and Fanconi anaemia.
 - Group 2 has diseases requiring long-term or lifelong treatment with a relatively lower cost of treatment and benefit has been documented in literature, including galactosemia, severe food protein allergy, and homocystinuria.
 - Group 3 has diseases for which definitive treatment is available, but challenges are to make optimal patient selection for benefit, and very high cost and lifelong therapy, covering diseases such as spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), Pompe disease, and Hunter syndrome.
- The policy says the government would provide financial assistance of up to Rs 20 lakh to poor patients and those covered under Ayushman Bharat for diseases under Group 1.
- The state governments would be asked to undertake treatment of diseases covered under Group 2, which largely include disorders managed with

special dietary formulae or food for special medical purposes (FSMP) and disorders that are manageable to other forms of therapy.

- For diseases classified under Group 3, which require life-long expensive treatments, the government would create a digital platform to bring together Centres for Excellence, patients undergoing treatment and corporate donors or prospective voluntary individuals who could help fund treatment.
- The government has identified eight Centres of Excellence for the treatment of rare diseases.

Details:

- Though the document specifies increasing the government support for treating patients with a rare disease from 15 lakh to 20 lakh – caregivers say this doesn't reflect the actual costs of treatment.
- It is argued that the new policy offers no support to patients awaiting treatment since the earlier National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases 2017 was kept in abeyance.
- Concerns have been raised about the new policy not considering Group 3 patients, who require lifelong treatment support.
- It has been demanded that at least two centres in every state need to be identified as a centre of excellence to help the patients avoid the time and cost of moving out.

4. U.S., Iran agree to indirect nuclear talks

Context:

The U.S. and Iran said that they would begin negotiations through intermediaries to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear programme.

Details:

- The announcement marks the first major progress in efforts to return both countries to the 2015 accord.
- The accord bound Iran to restrictions on its nuclear programmes in return for relief from the U.S. and international sanctions.
- The development comes nearly three years after President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal.

5. Govt. asks PSU refiners to review Saudi oil deals

What's in News?

Amid tensions with Saudi Arabia over oil production cuts, India has asked its state refiners to review contracts for buying crude oil from the West Asian nation and negotiate more favourable terms.

- Traditionally, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC producers have been the mainstay suppliers of crude oil for India. But their terms have often been unfavourable.
- Therefore, the government is now pressing for diversification of the supply base.
 - Keen to break the producers' cartel dictating pricing and contractual terms, the government has told PSUs to look for supplies from outside the region and use collective bargaining power to get favourable terms.
- Also, India is looking at buying from the spot market rather than through contracts as it would ensure that it can take advantage of any fall in prices on any day and book quantities.

Note:

- India imports 85% of its oil needs and is often vulnerable to global supply and price shocks.
- West Asia accounts for 60% of oil bought by India. Latin America and Africa are the other big supplier blocks.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Prudence prevails

Context

- The Union government has decided to retain India's inflation target at 4 per cent with a band of 2 per cent on either side for another five-year period, ending March 2026.

Inflation Targeting:

Background

- India adopted a flexible inflation targeting framework as a formal legal mandate of the RBI in 2016.

- The RBI Act, 1934, amended through the Finance Act of 2016, established a modern monetary policy framework with a clear objective of achieving price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
 - One of the sections of the amended law requires that the inflation target, set in terms of the year-on-year change in the headline Consumer Price Index, is to be determined by the central government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, once every five years.
- To control the price rise, the government in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep the retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for a five-year period ending March 31, 2021.

How does it work?

- Central banks with inflation targeting regimes define their target in terms of
 - point target
 - point target with tolerance bands
 - A range.
- Countries often start with a range, and after achieving a steady state of inflation, switch to a point target or a point target with a range.

What has India adopted?

- India has adopted a point target with a range.
- These have the advantage of being precise and giving a clear signal about the central bank's objective.
 - They are also symmetric, which conveys the central bank's intention of avoiding deflation as effectively as it would avoid inflation.
- While a range provides some flexibility in the conduct of monetary policy, it also conveys that the central bank may have imprecise control over the inflation target.

Significance of Government's move to retain inflation target at 4 plus/minus 2 per cent

- In recent months, there has been a debate about revising the inflation target to allow the central bank greater leeway to cut interest rates and focus on growth in the pandemic-struck economy.
- In addition to revising the target, many commentators had suggested modifying the inflation targeting framework. There have been calls to abandon it.
- The Economic Survey argued for changing the inflation metric from headline inflation to core inflation, and thus excluding food and fuel prices which are

transitory and mainly supply side factors that monetary policy cannot influence.

Despite pressures to alter the framework, the Central government announced its decision not to alter the framework.

- Changing the inflation targeting framework may have sounded like an attractive proposition but it would have created considerable uncertainty over the stance of monetary policy.
- It would have also indicated a lack of fidelity to the objective of maintaining price stability in the economy.
- The inflation targeting that India has adopted gives enough flexibility to the RBI to focus on growth without losing sight of its inflation-control objective.
- One of the features of the inflation-targeting framework is the “anchoring” of inflation expectations, any change that would have signalled greater tolerance by the interest rate-setting committee for higher levels of inflation, would have led to an increase in the volatility of prices, thereby destabilising inflationary expectations. These in turn would have a bearing on the long-term consumption and investment decisions taken by economic agents.

Conclusion

- The move will certainly reassure investors and savers that inflation remains a central concern for all policymakers. ★

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Time to undo the RTE bias against private non-minority institutions

Is RTE enforceable against individuals?

- Most fundamental rights are **enforceable against the state, not against private individuals.**
- Certain rights, however, are horizontally enforceable too, that is, they **can be enforced against individuals.**
- The **Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act** or RTE falls in the latter category.
- The right to education was initially mentioned in **Article 45** as a part of the **Directive Principles.**

Evolution of Article 21A

- The Supreme Court in **1992** held in **Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka** that the right to education was **a part of the right to life recognised in Article 21.**
- The next year, the court in **Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh** held that the **state was duty-bound to provide education** to children up to the age of 14 within its economic capacity.
- The court also acknowledged that **private educational institutions, including minority institutions,** would have to play a role alongside government schools.
- The right to education was finally given the status of a fundamental right by the 86th constitutional amendment in the year 2002 by the addition of **Article 21A** in the Constitution.
- The Supreme Court held in **P. A. Inamdar** case that there shall be no reservation in private institutions and that **minority and non-minority institutions would not be treated differently.**

Impact of 93rd amendment

- In 2005, the Constitution was amended by the 93rd amendment to include **Clause(5) to Article 15** which dealt with the fundamental right against discrimination.

- The clause **permitted the state to provide for advancement of “backward” classes** by ensuring their admission in institutions, including private institutions.
- The clause, however, **excluded both aided and unaided minority educational institutions** thus overruling the Supreme Court’s judgment in P.A. Inamdar case.

Discrimination in RTE

- When the RTE Act was subsequently enacted in 2009, it did not directly discriminate between students studying **in minority and non-minority institutions**.
- Subsequently, the provision of 25 per cent reservation in private institutions was however challenged in **Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan v. Union of India** where the court upheld the validity of the legislation **exempting only unaided minority schools from its purview**.
- In response to the judgment, the RTE Act was amended in 2012 to mention that **its provisions were subject to Articles 29 and 30** which protect the administrative rights of minority educational institutions.
- So, the onus on private unaided schools was much higher than that on government schools, while **even aided minority schools were exempt**.
- But the constitutional provision enabling the RTE Act, that is, **Article 21, does not make any discrimination between minority and non-minority institutions**.

Issues

- The above provisions of RTE made it violative of Article 14 and also economically unviable for many private schools.
- Not only has RTE unreasonably differentiated between minority and non-minority schools without any explicable basis, there is also **no rational nexus** between the object of universal education sought to be achieved by this act and the **step of excluding minority schools from its purview**.
- Given the **doctrine of harmonious construction of fundamental rights**, it is unclear why the court granted complete immunity to minority institutions when several provisions of RTE **would not interfere with their administrative rights**.
- RTE has provisions such as **prevention of physical/mental cruelty towards students as well as quality checks on pedagogical and teacher standards** which children studying in minority institutions should not **be deprived of and to that extent be discriminated against**.

Way forward

- The Kerala High Court held in *Sobha George v. State of Kerala* that Section 16 of RTE, which forbids non-promotion till the completion of elementary education, **will be applicable to minority schools as well.**
- The bench said that the courts must examine whether provisions such as **Section 16 of RTE are statutory rights or fundamental rights** expressed in a statutory form.
- If the latter, then the *Pramati* case judgement will not be fully available to minority institutions.
- The Supreme Court should take inspiration from the prudent decision delivered by the Kerala High Court and **overrule its own judgment delivered in the *Pramati Educational Society*.**

Conclusion

RTE as legislation may be well-intentioned, but the time has come to relook at the discriminatory nature of RTE against private non-minority institutions, and to that extent, undo the damage done by 93rd Amendment and the subsequent SC judgments.

2. Prakash Singh Judgment on Police Reforms, 2006

Political interference in police postings continues despite the landmark Prakash Singh judgment nearly a decade-and-a-half ago that addressed the issue and was pegged to be a watershed moment in police reforms.

What is the SC's Prakash Singh judgment on police reforms?

- Prakash Singh, who served as DGP of UP Police and Assam Police besides other postings, filed a PIL in the Supreme Court post-retirement, in 1996, seeking police reforms.
- In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court in September 2006 had directed all states and Union Territories to bring in police reforms.
- The ruling issued a series of measures that were to be undertaken by the governments to ensure the police could do their work without worrying about any political interference.

What measures were suggested by the Supreme Court?

- The seven main directives from the Supreme Court in the verdict were fixing the tenure and selection of the DGP to avoid situations where officers about to retire in a few months are given the post.

- In order to ensure no political interference, a minimum tenure was sought for the Inspector General of Police so that they are not transferred mid-term by politicians.
- The SC further directed postings of officers being done by Police Establishment Boards (PEB) comprising police officers and senior bureaucrats to insulate powers of postings and transfers from political leaders.
- Further, there was a recommendation of setting up the State Police Complaints Authority (SPCA) to give a platform where common people aggrieved by police action could approach.
- Apart from this, the SC directed the separation of investigation and law and order functions to better improve policing, setting up State Security Commissions (SSC) that would have members from civil society and forming a National Security Commission.

How did states respond to these directives?

- The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), in its report of 2020 has some useful data.
- It tracked changes made in the police force following the 2006 judgment.
- It has found that not even one state was fully compliant with the apex court directives and that while 18 states passed or amended their Police Acts in this time, not one fully matches legislative models.

What has been the response of the Supreme Court to these issues?

- Prakash Singh said that he has followed up on these issues and has had nearly five contempt petitions issued in the past decades to states found to be non-compliant.
- Singh said that bigger states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and UP have been the worst when it comes to bringing about systemic changes in line with the judgment and that it is only the North-Eastern states that have followed the suggested changes in spirit.
- Singh said states like Maharashtra make their own laws that are not effective.
- The need of the hour is an all-India Act that all states have to follow and small changes can be made in exceptional cases relating to the situation in a particular state.

3. 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting

Why in News

Recently, the External Affairs Minister of India participated in the **17th Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Ministerial Meeting**.

- The meeting, **chaired by Sri Lanka**, was held in virtual mode.

Key Points

- **India's Stand at the Meeting:**
 - **India's Commitment:**
 - To further **build the momentum of regional cooperation** under the **BIMSTEC framework** and make the organization stronger, vibrant, more effective and result-oriented.
 - **Progress:**
 - **Highlighted progress** achieved in sectors where India is the Lead Country viz Counter Terrorism & Trans-national Crime, Transport & Communication, Tourism, and Environmental & Disaster management and other activities.
 - **Importance of Connectivity:**
 - Robust **connectivity is an essential prerequisite for economic integration** of the region with smooth cross-border movement of people and goods.
- **Outcome of the Meeting:**
 - The meeting endorsed the **BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity** for adoption at the next BIMSTEC Summit, which will be held in Sri Lanka.
 - **India's northeastern states form a key part of the master plan**, with several road and river links passing through the region.
 - Called for early **adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter**.
 - The meeting also endorsed three MoUs/agreements relating to **convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic and training academies and establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo (Sri Lanka)**.
 - Took note that the **BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate**, being **hosted in India**, is fully functional with state of the art facilities to provide Disaster Early Warnings.
- **Concern:**
 - Cohesion among the members has been difficult to achieve mainly because of the **Rohingya refugee crisis** which created **bitterness between Myanmar and Bangladesh**.
 - This affected the working of the organisation to some extent as it could not develop a common charter.

BIMSTEC

- **About:**
 - The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a **regional organization**.
 - It comprises **seven countries**. Five of these seven countries- **India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Bangladesh**- are from South Asia while the remaining two, **Thailand and Myanmar**, are from Southeast Asia.
 - The group remained dormant for many years till it was revived a few years ago as an alternative to the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**, which despite having the potential, has not been able to move forward due to friction between India and Pakistan.
 - With a focus on intra-regional cooperation, the BIMSTEC has also **formed a platform with the SAARC and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries**.
 - Currently, the BIMSTEC is **involved in 15 sectors** including trade, technology, agriculture, tourism, fisheries, energy and climate change among others, for sectoral cooperation.
 - In 1997, it started with just six sectors and later expanded to the remaining nine sectors in 2008.
 - **Secretariat:** Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **Objectives:**
 - Creating an **enabling environment for the rapid economic development** of the sub-region.
 - Encouraging the spirit of **equality and partnership**.
 - Promoting active **collaboration and mutual assistance** in the areas of common interests of the member countries.
 - Accelerating **support for each other** in the fields of education, science, and technology, etc.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4. Harmonized System of Nomenclature Code

It has been made mandatory for a GST taxpayer having a turnover of more than Rs 5 crore in the preceding financial year, to furnish 6 digits HSN Code (Harmonized System of Nomenclature Code). This comes into effect from April 1.

HSN code

- The Harmonized System, or simply 'HS', is a six-digit identification code developed by the World Customs Organization (WCO).
- Called the "universal economic language" for goods, it is a multipurpose international product nomenclature.
- Over 200 countries use the system as a basis for their customs tariffs, gathering international trade statistics, making trade policies, and monitoring goods.
- The system helps in harmonizing customs and trade procedures, thus reducing costs in international trade.

What makes the 6 digit code?

- A unique six-digit code has numbers arranged in a legal and logical structure, with well-defined rules to achieve uniform classification.
- Of the six digits, the first two denote the HS Chapter, the next two give the HS heading, and the last two give the HS subheading.
- The HS Code for pineapple, for example, is 0804.30, which means it belongs to Chapter 08 (Edible fruit & nuts, peel of citrus/melons), Heading 04 (Dates, figs, pineapples, avocados, etc. fresh or dried), and Subheading 30 (Pineapples).

5. The conundrum of financial distress and higher household savings amid covid

Increase in savings during lockdown

- Counterintuitively, the financial savings of people went up in April-June 2020.
- Data compiled by the RBI reveal that in **April-June 2020, household financial savings was ₹8.16 trillion.**
- For a perspective on how big this is, in April-June 2019, household financial savings was ₹2.02 trillion.
- In July-September 2019, it was ₹4.85 trillion and in the two following quarters, it was ₹4.2 trillion and ₹5.14 trillion, respectively.
- As a percentage of GDP, it was **21% of GDP in April-June 2020** (the lockdown quarter) against 4% of GDP in April-June 2019.

So, what happened to savings in the next quarter?

- In the immediate quarter after April-June 2020, would you expect savings to move up, as things were opening up gradually?
- Again, counter-intuitive.

- In July-September 2020, household savings was ₹4.92 lakh crore, or 10.4% of GDP.

What explains such saving behaviour?

- This has got to do with the human response to an emergency situation.
- When things are looking bleak, one does not know how worse it can get.
- **Discretionary spending was cut down.**
- One section of the population was losing jobs and opting for moratorium on loans.
- Now we know, in hindsight, that **it was not the entire population** – people with access to means were rather saving than spending.
- Household financial savings is the **net of flow of financial assets minus flow of financial liabilities.**
- In April-June 2020, **flow of financial assets** at ₹7.38 trillion was much higher than ₹3.83 trillion of April-June 2019.
- The big difference was the **flow of financial liabilities.**
- In April-June 2020, it was a **negative 0.78 trillion** over a positive ₹1.81 trillion in April-June 2019.
- That is, **people paid off their liabilities** in April-June 2020, whereas usually they add to it.
- Things normalized in July-September 2020.
- The flow of financial assets rose to 7.47 trillion, but the flow of financial liabilities was ₹2.55 trillion i.e., **people added to financial liabilities.**
- **The household debt to GDP ratio rose to 37.1%** in July-September 2020 from 35.4% in April-June 2020.

What do we learn from all this?

- In a pandemic-induced financial distress phase, a majority of the **people preferred to save.**
- One basic tenet of financial planning is that you have an emergency fund equivalent to, say, **six months of expenses.**
- People usually follow the principle of **Income - Expenses = Savings/Investments.**
- Ideally, it should be **Income - Savings/Investments = Expenses.**

Conclusion

The data from the RBI attest to the well-established fact that people tend to save in emergencies. This also suggests that the demand-led recovery path during emergencies faces the risk of failure.

6. Exercise 'Shantir Ogroshena'

Indian Army team comprising officers, junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and soldiers from the Dogra regiment will participate in the multilateral exercise 'Shantir Ogroshena' (front runner of peace).

Shantir Ogroshena

- Indian Army will participate in Multinational Military Exercise namely SHANTIR OGROSHENA -2021 in Bangladesh.
- The nine days exercise will start on the 4th of this month to commemorate the birth centenary of Bangladesh Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and mark glorious 50 years of liberation.
- The theme of the exercise is 'Robust Peace Keeping Operations'. Military observers from the US, UK, Turkey, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore will also be in attendance throughout the exercise.
- Military observers from the USA, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore will also be in attendance throughout the exercise.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Tholpavakoothu is a ritual art popular in which of the following states?

- a. Kerala
- b. Karnataka
- c. Tamil Nadu
- d. Andhra Pradesh

Answer : a

- Tholpavakoothu is believed to be more than 350 years old.
- Performed in the Bhadrakali temples, from January to June every year, the shadow puppeteers of Kerala are busy performing the story of the Ramayana as part of the rituals during temple festivals.

2. Consider the following statements with respect to BIMSTEC:

1. It was formed through the Bangkok Declaration.
2. Nepal and Pakistan are not members of BIMSTEC.
3. The platform helps India fulfil its 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- BIMSTEC was formed in 1997, originally with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and later included Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.
- BIMSTEC now includes five countries from South Asia and two from ASEAN.
- It includes all the major countries of South Asia, except Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil its key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'.

3. With reference to Lingayats, consider the following statements:

1. The sect was founded by social reformer and philosopher Basavanna in vedic period.
2. The Lingayats are strict monotheists and worship only Vishnu.

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 Lingayat denotes a person who **wears a personal linga**, the aniconic form of god Shiva, on the body, which is received during the initiation ceremony.

- The tradition of Lingayatism is known to have been **founded by social reformer and philosopher Basavanna in 12th century Karnataka** (not in vedic period). **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The Lingayats are **strict monotheists**. They enjoin the worship of only one God, namely, **Linga (Shiva)**. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The word 'Linga' does not mean Linga established in temples, but universal consciousness qualified by the universal energy (Shakti).

4. Central Pollution Control Board is a statutory organisation which was constituted under the

- A Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
B Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
C Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
D National Environment Tribunal Act, 1995.

Answer : A

Explanation

- Central Pollution Control Board is a statutory organisation which was **constituted in September, 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**. **Hence, option A is correct.**
- It is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**.
- It serves as a field formation and also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change of the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986

5. With reference to the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-Accelerator), consider the following statements:

1. It is a global collaboration launched by the G20 countries.
2. It aims to end the Covid-19 pandemic and restore full societal and economic activity globally.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
B 2 only

C Both 1 and 2
D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : B

Explanation

- ACT-Accelerator was launched in the month of **April, 2020** at an event **co-hosted by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), the President of France, the President of the European Commission, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- It brings together governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, and philanthropists and global health organizations.
 - The participants include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CEPI, Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND), Gavi, The Global Fund, Unitaid, Wellcome Trust (London), the WHO and the World Bank.
- It **aims to end the pandemic**, restore full societal and economic activity globally and facilitate high-level control of Covid-19 disease. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The ACT-Accelerator is organized into four pillars of work:
 - Diagnostics, treatment, vaccines and health system strengthening.
 - Each pillar is vital to the overall effort and involves innovation and collaboration.

6. Stockholm+50 is a high level meeting that will primarily focus on which of the following area?

- a. Arms control and disarmament.
- b. Counter Terrorism and Cyber Security
- c. Artificial Intelligence and Cryptocurrency
- d. Environmental Conservation

Answer : d

Stockholm+50

- It is a high-level meeting that the Government of Sweden plans to hold in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the first UN conference on the human environment the 1972 Stockholm Conference.

- The aim of Stockholm+50 is to leverage sustainable consumption and production patterns and nature-based solutions in order to achieve climate-neutral, resilient, circular and inclusive economies.
- The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the Stockholm Conference, was the first UN conference on the environment and was held between 5 and 16 June 1972 in Stockholm.
- The meeting's outcome document the Stockholm Declaration included several principles that are still important for environmental management.
- Another result of the meeting was the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Environment Day, held annually on 5 June.

Mains Practice Questions

1. The Union Budget 2021 has proposed setting up a National bad bank to restore banks' health. Critically discuss the idea for ameliorating the banking sector's stress.

Approach

- Start the answer by discussing the concept of bad banks.
- Provide arguments for and against the bad banks
- Conclude suitably.

2. Discuss the term Constitutional Morality and its significance?

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly discussing what is constitutional morality.
- Discuss the significance of constitutional morality.
- Conclude Suitably.