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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Govt. mulling ways to boost yield from poppy

What's in News?

The Union government has decided to rope in the private sector to commence production of concentrated poppy straw from India's opium crop.

- Among the few countries permitted to cultivate the opium poppy crop for export and extraction of alkaloids, India currently only extracts alkaloids from opium gum at facilities controlled by the Revenue Department in the Finance Ministry.
- This entails farmers extracting gum by manually lancing the opium pods and selling the gum to government factories.
- The Ministry has decided to switch to new technologies, after trial cultivation reports by two private firms showed higher extraction of alkaloids using the concentrated poppy straw (CPS).
- The move is planned to boost the yield of alkaloids used for medical purposes and exported to several countries.
- It is likely to require amendments to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

Note:

Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are the three traditional opium-growing States, where poppy cultivation is allowed based on licences issued annually by the Central Bureau of Narcotics.

2. For Lok Adalats, speed overrides quality

Context:

- The first National Lok Adalat (NLA) of 2021 will be held on April 10.

Background:

Evolution of Lok Adalats:

- Lok Adalats had existed even before they received explicit statutory recognition. In 1949, Harivallabh Parikh, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, popularised Lok Adalats in Rangpur, Gujarat.
- **The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, inserted Article 39A to ensure “equal justice and free legal aid”.**
- **The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, was enacted by Parliament and it came into force in 1995 “to provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections of the society” and to “organise Lok Adalats to secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity”.

Functioning:

- The Lok Adalats function as an **alternative dispute resolution tool**.
- Motor-accident claims, disputes related to public-utility services, cases related to the dishonour of cheques, and land, labour and matrimonial disputes (except divorce) are usually taken up by Lok Adalats.
- They are regularly organised to help parties reach a compromise.

Significance:

Easing the case burden of judiciary:

- **The Indian judicial system is plagued by endemic delays and excessive backlogs.** Justice delayed is justice denied.
 - As per the National Judicial Data Grid, 16.9% of all cases in district and taluka courts are three to five years old; for High Courts, 20.4% of all cases are five to 10 years old, and over 17% are 10-20 years old.
 - Over 66,000 cases are pending before the Supreme Court, over 57 lakh cases before various HCs, and over **3 crore cases are pending before various district and subordinate courts.**
- Data from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) show that Lok Adalats organised across the country from 2016 to 2020 disposed of 52,46,415 cases. Similarly, National Lok Adalats (NLAs) organised under the aegis of NALSA settle a huge number of cases across the country in a single day. From 2016 to 2020, NLAs have disposed of a total of 2,93,19,675 cases.
- Hence Lok Adalats, as a forum, have been able to address the problems of high backlog cases in the judiciary.

Ease of dispute settlement:

Speed of settlement:

- When compared to litigation, and even other dispute resolution devices, such as arbitration and mediation, Lok Adalats offer parties speed of settlement, as **cases are disposed of in a single day.**

Part driven process:

- Lok Adalats involves mainly a party-driven process, allowing the parties involved to reach an amicable settlement.

Procedural flexibility:

- Under the Lok Adalat system, there is **no strict application of procedural laws** such as the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, etc.

Economic affordability:

- There are **no court fees** for placing matters before the Lok Adalats.

Finality of awards:

- **The order by the Lok Adalats are final and binding and no further appeal is allowed against such orders.** This prevents delays in the settlement of disputes.
 - The award issued by a Lok Adalat, after the filing of a joint compromise petition, has the status of a civil court decree.

Increased access to justice:

- Access to justice for the poor is a constitutional mandate to ensure fair treatment under our legal system.
- Lok Adalats have been successful in making justice accessible and affordable to all.

Concerns:

- The **discontinuance of the subject matter-specific NLAs** from 2017 has led to a significant drop in the number of cases settled.
- The **e-Lok Adalats** organized to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic **have been less efficient than the physical National Lok Adalats** organised in 2017, 2018, and 2019.
- There is a growing concern with Lok Adalats that **in the endeavour for speedy disposal of cases, Lok Adalats undermines the idea of justice.** The

system seems to be trading justice off for high settlement numbers and speed, ignoring the old dictum that **justice hurried is justice buried**.

- In a majority of cases, litigants are pitted against entities with deep pockets, such as insurance companies, banks, electricity boards, among others. In many cases, compromises are imposed on the poor who often have no choice but to accept them.
- Similarly, poor women under the so-called 'harmony ideology' of the state are virtually dictated by family courts to compromise matrimonial disputes.
- The Lok Adalat system instead of empowering the poor may be coercing them to accept unjust compromises.
- The Lok Adalat system seems to have given rise to a **dual system of justice dispensation**, where the formal legal system, i.e., the court, is meant only for the rich and powerful and the poor given the ease of procedure often resort to dispute resolution under the Lok Adalat system. This view has been expressed by even former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi.

Conclusion:

- The system must look beyond the swift disposal of cases and focus on just and fair outcomes. A **just outcome of a legal process is far more important than expeditious disposal**. Besides efficiency and speed, Lok Adalats should also **focus on the quality of justice delivered**.
- The Judiciary must take concrete and innovative steps in improving the quality of justice rendered by National Lok Adalats.

3. PM to launch vessel for the Seychelles

What's in News?

Prime Minister of India handed over a fast patrol vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard.

- The handing over is a part of a high-level virtual interaction between the Indian leader and the President of Seychelles.
- The African archipelago nation has been a steady part of India's policy for the Indian Ocean region.
 - India gifted similar vessels to Seychelles in 2005, 2014 and 2016.
- The fast patrol vessel PS Zoroaster will help Seychelles in carrying out anti-piracy operations.
- The vessel was built by the Kolkata-based Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineering Limited.
- India also gifted 50,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine to Seychelles.

4. Russia to supply military gear to Pakistan

Context:

Boost in ties between Russia and Pakistan.

Details:

- Russia's Foreign Minister said Moscow and Islamabad would boost ties in the fight against terrorism, with Russia providing unspecified military equipment to Pakistan and the two holding joint exercises at sea and in the mountains.
- Russia is also building a gas pipeline between the southern port city of Karachi and eastern Lahore.
- Sergey Lavrov spoke on the second day of a two-day trip to Pakistan.
 - It's the first visit by a Russian Foreign Minister in nine years, part of an effort to improve ties.
- According to experts, the visit underlines the waning influence of the U.S. in the region, while Russian and Chinese clout grows.
- The apparent reset in Pakistani-Russian relations is by contrast a recent phenomena.
- In the 1980s, Pakistan was a staging arena for anti-communist Afghan rebels who were aided by the U.S. to oust the former Soviet Union, which negotiated an end to a 10-year occupation in 1989.

Russia's involvement in the Afghanistan Peace Process:

- Boost in ties with Pakistan comes as Moscow seeks to increase its stature in the region, particularly in Afghanistan.
- The US is reviewing an agreement it signed more than a year ago with the Taliban as it rethinks the withdrawal of its soldiers. Meanwhile, Moscow has stepped up its involvement in Afghanistan, emerging as a significant player.
- There, Russia has sought to inject itself as a key player in efforts to find a peaceful end to decades of war.
- Recently, it hosted talks between the Taliban and senior government officials.

5. A way forward for trans persons

- **13 members of the transgender community have been selected recently as constables under the Chhattisgarh police.** This marks a significant step forward in the recognition of the rights of the transgender community.
 - Earlier, a few transgenders were inducted into the Tamil Nadu police too.

- The selection despite the lack of reservation for the transgender community highlights the physical and mental competence of the candidates and will help shed the stigma of identity, disability, criminality, or untouchability.
- This will certainly help in changing the perception of people towards the community by aiding society in erasing its biases and **accept transgender people as equal human beings**.

NALSA vs. Union of India (2014) case:

- The Supreme Court in the NALSA vs. Union of India (2014) case ruled that **transgender persons have the right to decide their self-identified gender**. The binary notion of gender, which denied equal protection of law to transgenders, was rejected by the top court.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, recognises that transgender persons have a legal right to self-perceived gender identity in accordance with the principle of the “Psychological Test” instead of the “Biological Test”. It paved the way for issuing a **certificate of transgender identity**.
- According to law, **transgender persons cannot be discriminated against in any matter relating to employment by any establishment**.
- The act is in spirit with international conventions, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, and the **Yogyakarta Principles, 2006**.

6. Abortion is a woman's right to decide

Context:

- Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021.

Background:

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971:

- **The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (MTP)** was a progressive act at that time considering that concerning provisions in the Indian Penal Code were traditional in their outlook. Abortions were a crime and the woman concerned and her doctor would invariably land up in jail.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (MTP) **allows for legal abortions in India with some restrictions**.

- Section 3 of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 put an **outer limit of 20 weeks** on the length of the pregnancy and required two doctors to certify that the continuation of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the woman or grave injury to her physical or mental health or that there was a substantial risk that the child born would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.
 - Rape cases, pregnancies occurring as a result of the failure of contraception have also been considered as valid reasons for abortion over the years.
- **Section 5 created an exception to the 20-week limit** whenever such an abortion was immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Concerns:

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 even though extends the time period within which an abortion can be carried out, fails miserably on the following counts.

Undermining women's rights:

- The amendment to the abortion laws is based on the traditional notion that the state can and must intervene and decide for women as to when and in what circumstances abortions may be carried out **undermining a woman's absolute right over her reproductive choices**.
- This also undermines a woman's right over her own body.

Unsafe abortions:

- The regulation of abortions in India seems to have pushed women seeking abortions underground where terminations are carried out in unhygienic settings. Even today about **800,000 illegal and unsafe abortions are performed every year in India, many of them resulting in morbidities and death**.

Limit not based on scientific advancement:

- 24 weeks is not a rational limit given today's technology.
- The **phenomenal improvement in technology and processes** render it possible to carry out abortions safely right up to full term. Thus the excuse of "safety of the woman" is no longer tenable to be used for restricting women's rights.

State regulation:

- Even though the limit has been pushed back from 20 to 24 weeks, this comes with the **same state conditionalities as before**.
- Indigent women in difficult circumstances trying to have abortions have been stonewalled by government officials and prosecutors.

Medical boards as obstacles:

- Section 3(2B) of the Act requires the pregnant woman to approach a medical board in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities and where she has crossed the 24-week limit.
- These boards impose insurmountable obstacles to the woman seeking late abortions.
 - The proposed provision of a board of a minimum of three doctors seems unnecessary and marks a **breach of privacy** of the concerned woman.
 - The Act provides in Section 3(2C) for a **single board for a State**. Given the millions of abortions taking place in India past the deadline, it is impossible for one board to handle all cases.
 - No State has **the finances or the human resources to maintain the operation and functioning of these boards**.

Conclusion:

- Keeping in line with the trend worldwide, pregnant women seeking an abortion should be left alone to consult their gynaecologist in late-term pregnancies and carry out their abortion under the certificate of their own gynaecologist that the abortion can be performed safely.
- This would mark a significant step forward towards **women's emancipation**.

7. IMPRINT India programme

- **IMP**acting Research, **IN**novation and **T**echnology (IMPRINT) is a national initiative of the Ministry of Education designed to address all major engineering challenges relevant to India through an inclusive and sustainable mode of translational research.
- IMPRINT India Programme is a joint initiative of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).
- It seeks to develop a road map for research to solve major engineering and technology challenges in 10 technology domains relevant to the country.
- These domains include health care, information and communication technology, energy, sustainable habitat, nano-technology hardware, water resources and river systems, advanced materials, manufacturing, security and defence, and environment and climate.

8. U.S. military cites rising risk of Beijing's move against Taiwan

Context:

The American military is warning that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan.

Details:

- Taiwan – the island democracy has been the chief source of tension between Washington and Beijing for decades.
 - It is widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war.
- The worry about Taiwan comes as China wields new strength from years of military buildup. Beijing also has become more confrontational with Washington.
- A military move against Taiwan would be a test of U.S. support for the island.
- For the Biden administration, it could present the choice of abandoning a friendly, democratic entity or risking what could become an all-out war.
- While the U.S. has long pledged to help Taiwan defend itself, it has deliberately left unclear how far it would go in response to a Chinese attack.
- The US has been pushing Taiwan to modernise its military so it can become a porcupine, which is hard for China to attack.

Taiwan's Concerns:

- Taiwan has witnessed mounting Chinese military pressure, including aircraft carrier drills, near the island.
- The Chinese military in the last couple of years has been conducting what the Taiwan Foreign Minister called “real combat-type” exercises closer to the island.
- It has complained of repeated military activities by Beijing in recent months, with China's Air Force making almost daily forays in Taiwan's air defence identification zone.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

9. Deconstructing declarations of carbon-neutrality

Context:

- There has been a growing international chorus, led by global civil society organisations urging all countries to make explicit declarations with respect to carbon neutrality.
- An increasing number of countries are declaring in some documented form or other, their proposed intention to achieve carbon-neutral status by around mid-century.
 - As per Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), by April 2021, **about 32 countries had declared their proposed intention to achieve carbon-neutral status.** Of these, only eight have any firm status, the rest being in the form of proposed legislation or mentions in policy documents.

Background:

Temperature goal:

- The declaration of intent of the Paris Agreement, as stated in **Article 2 of the Paris climate deal**, aims to limit temperature rise to well below 2°C and further pursuing efforts to restrict it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Carbon neutrality:

- **Article 4.1 of the Paris Agreement** urges nations to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.

Concerns with respect to carbon neutrality calls:

- The authors of the article argue against the increasing demand from developed countries and global civil society organizations urging all countries including developing countries like India to declare carbon neutrality goals.

Against principles of equity:

- Notably while urging the nations to seek carbon neutrality at the earliest, Article 4.1 of the Paris agreement also recognizes the fact that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties which are also required to work towards the eradication of poverty. It recognizes the **principles of equity** while emphasizing the importance of sustainable development.
- Article 2.2 declares that the Paris Agreement “will be implemented to reflect equity and the **principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities**, in the light of different national circumstances”.

Global and not individual goals:

- As against the notion being created by the developed country governments and civil society outfits of carbon neutrality being an individual commitment by all countries, a correct understanding of the stated provisions of the Paris climate agreement makes it clear that the balance of emissions and removal of greenhouse gases is not sought on a country-wise basis but for the world as a whole.
- The text of the Paris Agreement clearly indicates, based on considerations of equity and differentiation, that carbon neutrality is a global goal wherein the developed world will have to take higher responsibility based on considerations of equity and differentiation.

Insufficient climate action:

- The growing popularity of carbon neutrality seems to ignore the fact that **the achievement of carbon neutrality is not compatible with achieving the 1.5°C goal.**
- The mid-century carbon neutrality goals of developed countries will not be sufficient to meet the temperature goals set out by the Paris climate agreement.
- According to The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming, of 1.5° warming what remains of the global carbon budget from 2018 onwards, for a 50% probability of restricting temperature rise to less than 1.5°C, is 480 Giga-tonnes (billion tonnes) of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂eq). At the current rate of emissions of about 42 GtCO₂eq per year, this budget would be consumed in 12 years. **To keep within the 480 Gt budget, at a steady linear rate of decline, global carbon neutrality must be reached by 2039.**
 - The global carbon budget indicates the limits on global cumulative emissions, from the pre-industrial era to the time when net emissions cease, that correspond to definite levels of global temperature rise.

Emissions in the West:

- The hollowness of nation-level carbon neutrality declarations by developed countries is brought out by a detailed understanding of the emission data.
 - Emissions in the U.S. (not considering land use and land use change and forest-related emissions) (LULUCF), peaked in 2005 and have declined at an average rate of 1.1% from then till 2017, with a maximum annual reduction of 6.3% in 2009. Even if it did reach net-zero by 2050 at a steady linear rate of reduction, which is unprecedented, its cumulative emissions between 2018 and 2050 would be 106 GtCO₂, which is 22% of the total remaining carbon budget for the whole world. If the U.S. has to stay within its fair share of the remaining carbon budget, **it would have to reach net-zero emissions (with linear reduction) by 2025.**
 - Similarly, the European Union, to keep to its fair share of the remaining carbon budget **would have to reach net-zero by 2033**, with a constant annual reduction in emissions. If the EU reaches net-zero only by 2050 it would consume at least 71 GtCO₂, well above its fair share.

Arguments against India declaring carbon neutrality goal: ★

- The authors argue against India committing to carbon neutrality declarations, based on the following reasons.
 - Given the **high number of poor** in the country, India has to stay focused on economic growth.
 - India continues to have a **low per capita carbon footprint.**
 - India **does not owe a carbon debt** to the world. India's emissions (non-LULUCF) are no more than 3.5% of global cumulative emissions prior to 1990 and about 5% since till 2018.
 - India's mitigation efforts are quite compatible with a 2°C target.
 - India's current annual emissions are low enough to not seriously dent the emissions gap between what the world needs and the current level of mitigation effort.
 - Any self-sacrificial declaration of carbon neutrality today in the current international scenario would be a wasted gesture reducing the burden of the developed world and transferring it to the backs of the Indian people.

Recommendations:

- The following aspects would require greater attention going forward to ensure effective climate action.
 - Adoption of **green growth strategy**
 - Low-carbon technologies and processes
 - **Adaptation to climate** impacts

- Research into the science of **carbon capture**

Conclusion:

- The hard scientific reality is that **three-way compatibility between temperature goals, carbon neutrality, and equity would be very hard to achieve.**
- India should not join the growing calls for carbon neutrality as it has to stay focused on development as its immediate need and aspirational goal. India must reject any attempt to restrict its options and be led into a **low-development trap.**
- India's approach to eventual net-zero emissions must be contingent on deep first world emissions reductions and an adequate and unambiguous global carbon budget.

10. Incentives for solar energy sector

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved two production-linked incentive schemes.

1. White goods (air-conditioners and LED lights).
2. High-efficiency solar photovoltaic modules.

Details:

- ₹6,238-crore has been approved for the PLI scheme for air-conditioners and LEDs.
- The scheme would extend an incentive of 4% to 6% on incremental sales of goods made in India for five years.
- The Cabinet also approved a proposal of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy for a PLI scheme for high-efficiency solar PV modules with an outlay of ₹4,500 crore.
- Solar capacity addition presently depends largely upon imported solar PV cells and modules as the domestic manufacturing industry has limited operational capacities of solar PV cells and modules.
- The National Programme on High Efficiency Solar PV Modules will reduce import dependence in a strategic sector like electricity.

National Programme on High Efficiency Solar PV Modules:

- The programme aims to achieve manufacturing capacity in the Giga Watt scale in high-efficiency solar PV modules.

- The Solar Photo Voltaic manufacturers are to be selected through a transparent competitive bidding process.
- The scheme will reward manufacturers with higher efficiencies of solar Photo Voltaic modules.
- Also, they will be incentivised for sourcing their material from the domestic markets.

Significance:

- The prime objective of the PLI scheme is to make manufacturing in India globally competitive by removing sectoral disabilities, creating economies of scale and ensuring efficiencies.
- It is designed to create a complete component ecosystem in India and make India an integral part of the global supply chains.
- Also, this is another step towards the vision of “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India).
- The scheme is estimated to lead to incremental investment, an increase in production as well as the creation of jobs.

11. RBI extends fresh support of ₹50,000 cr. to NABARD, others

Context:

The RBI has said it would extend fresh support of ₹50,000 crore to the All India Financial Institutions for new lending in FY22.

Details:

- NABARD will be provided with a special liquidity facility (SLF) of ₹25,000 crore for one year to support agriculture and allied activities, the rural non-farm sector and non-banking financial companies-micro finance institutions.
- An SLF of ₹10,000 crore will be extended to the National Housing Bank for one year to support the housing sector.
- SIDBI will be provided ₹15,000 crore under this facility for up to one year for funding of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- All three facilities will be available at the prevailing policy repo rate.
- The move is aimed to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic and aid economic revival.

Note:

Asset Reconstruction Companies:

- The RBI said that, while ARCs had grown in number and size, their potential for resolving stressed assets was yet to be realised fully.
- It signalled the importance of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) to deal with bad loans.
- RBI said that it would constitute a committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of ARCs in the financial sector ecosystem and recommend suitable measures for enabling such entities to meet the growing requirements of the financial sector.

Priority Sector Lending Classification for Lending to NBFCs:

- A six-month extension has been approved to September 30 for Priority Sector Lending (PSL) classification for lending by banks to NBFCs for 'on-lending' to sectors that contribute significantly to the economy in terms of export and employment.
- This would provide an impetus to NBFCs providing credit at the bottom of the pyramid.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Need to remove the secrecy around the electoral bonds

Secrecy in donations

- Before the electoral bond scheme, every transaction of **more than Rs 20,000** was reported to the Election Commission.
- Now even Rs 20 crore or Rs 200 crore could be **donated anonymously**.
- Why should donors want secrecy? To hide return favours, like contracts, licences and bank loans.
- Both the RBI and ECI, standing up to their mandates, had registered their strong protest.

How electoral bond scheme led to changes in provisions of other Acts

- To make way for electoral bonds amendments were introduced in the **Reserve Bank of India Act, Companies Act, Income Tax Act, Representation of the People Act and Foreign Contribution Regulations Act**.
- There were **three serious changes** which did not receive the deserved attention.

1) Limit of 7.5 per cent removed

- First, **the limit of 7.5 per cent of its profits** which a company could donate was not just increased but completely done away with by amending **section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013**.
- Thus a company could donate 100 per cent of its profits to a political party.
- Even a **loss-making company** could make political donations.
- This is a **sure step to legitimise and legalise crony capitalism**.

2) Requirement of resolution removed

- The requirements for **a resolution by the board of directors** for a company to make donations to political parties and **to declare the political donations in the profit and loss accounts** were also removed.
- This would allow keeping the donations secret not only from the public but **the owners of the company, the shareholders** – ironically, all in the name of transparency.

3) Secrecy in contribution from foreign source

- Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 **prohibits all political parties** from accepting any contribution from a “foreign source.”
- Section 3 of the 2010 **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act** bars candidates, legislative members, political parties and party officeholders from accepting foreign contributions.
- When the High Court of Delhi in 2014 found Congress and BJP having accepted foreign funds in violation of the FCRA 1976, the government passed a **retroactive amendment** through a **2016 Finance Bill** which repealed the 1976 Act and replaced it with the modified 2010 statute.
- If any foreign country is financing our elections, **it will now be a protected secret.**

Way forward

- The Supreme Court’s concern about the possibility of misuse of funds is very pertinent.
- The EC has been demanding that a law be passed to make political parties liable to **get their accounts audited by an auditor from a panel suggested by the CAG or EC.**
- If the government don’t want to abolish the electoral bond scheme it should just make changes to it **to disclose the donor and the recipient.**
- Another alternative is to **do away with private fund collection** altogether and replace it with public funding of political parties.
- This is **not likely to be more than Rs 10,000 crore every five years**, if we were to go by the entire collection all the parties make together.
- Another feasible option is to establish a **National Election Fund** to which all donations could be directed.
- This would take care of the imaginary **fear of political reprisal of the donors.**

Conclusion

- We must not forget the finance minister’s opening statement in the 2017 Budget speech that “without transparency of political funding, free and fair elections are not possible”.

2. Anamaya: Tribal Health Collaborative

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has launched **Tribal Health Collaborative (THC) 'Anamaya'** through a video conference.

- In 2018, an expert committee released a **comprehensive report on tribal health** in India which highlighted the issues and concerns of tribal health.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It is an initiative **bringing together** governments, philanthropists, national and international foundations, **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to end all preventable deaths among the tribal communities of India.**
 - It will **converge efforts of various Government agencies and organisations** to enhance the health and nutrition status of the tribal communities of India.
- **Aim:**
 - To **build a sustainable, high-performing health ecosystem** to address the key health challenges faced by the tribal population of India.
- **Stakeholders:**
 - It is a multi-stakeholder initiative of the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** supported by **Piramal Foundation** and **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)**.
 - **Piramal Foundation** is the philanthropic arm of Piramal Group. The foundation undertakes projects under the four broad areas – **healthcare, education, livelihood creation and youth empowerment.**
- **Operation:**
 - It will **begin its operations with 50 tribal, Aspirational Districts** (with more than 20% **Scheduled Tribe** population) across 6 high tribal population states.
 - Over a **10-year period**, the work of the THC will be **extended to 177 tribal Districts** as recognised by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- **Other Initiatives Related to the Tribal Communities:**
 - **Programme for Capacity Building of Scheduled Tribe (ST) Representatives in Local Self Governments:**
 - It is aimed at empowering tribal **Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)** representatives by enhancing their decision making capabilities at local government level.
 - **1000 Springs Initiative:**
 - The **1000 Springs Initiative** aims at improving access to safe and adequate water for the tribal communities living in difficult and inaccessible parts of rural areas in the country.
 - The initiative will help in harnessing the potential of perennial springs' water to address natural scarcity of water in tribal areas.
 - **Tribal Health Cell:**

- A 'Tribal Health Cell' is being set up in the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**.
- It will help central ministries and state governments to **facilitate and strengthen primary health care** systems and **invest in tribal health research**.

3. India's Life Expectancy on World Health Day 2021

Why in News

According to the estimates from the **Sample Registration System (SRS)-based Abridged Life Tables 2014-18** of the **Census and Registrar General of India**, the life expectancy of an Indian child born on **World Health Day 2021** is below the world's average.

- Every year **7th April** marks the celebration of **World Health Day**.

Key Points

- **Life Expectancy:**
 - It is an estimate of the average number of additional years that a person of a given age can expect to live.
 - The most common measure of life expectancy is **life expectancy at birth**.
 - India's life expectancy (for a child born in 2021) which is **69 years and 4 months** is less than the **world's average lifespan of 72.81 years**.
- **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):**
 - It is the **number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under one year of age**.
 - For India, **IMR is 33**.
- **Life Expectancy will be Reduced Further Due to Pollution:**
 - The quality of life of these children will suffer and the average life span is estimated to be cut short by two years and six months due by constant exposure to "**toxic air**" in the country.
 - India topped the chart by recording the world's highest annual average concentration of PM 2.5 exposure in its air in 2019, according to the **State of Global Air 2020**.
 - In 2020, India was home to 35 of the world's 50 most polluted cities, according to **IQ Air's World Air Quality Report**.
 - These included **Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr and Delhi among the top 10**.
 - Thus, an **Indian child will live for 66 years and 8 months only** and may not survive to celebrate his/her 67th birthday beyond April 2089.

World Health Day

- **About:**
 - Its idea was conceived at the First Health Assembly in 1948 and it came into effect in 1950.
 - Over the years, it has brought to light important health issues such as mental health, maternal and child care and climate change.
- **Aim:**
 - To create awareness of a specific health theme to highlight a priority area of concern for the **World Health Organization (WHO)**.
- **Theme for 2021:**
 - Building a fairer, healthier world for everyone.
- **Some Indian Initiatives in Health Sector:**
 - **National Medical Commission (NMC) Act, 2019.**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana.**
 - **Pradhan Mantri - Jan Arogya Yojana.**
 - **India's Health Index.**

SRS-Based Abridged Life Tables

- **About:**
 - A life table **states the probabilities of survival** of a hypothetical group or cohort at different ages, which gradually diminish due to deaths.
 - With the introduction of the **Sample Registration System (SRS)**, an alternative source of data has become available for construction of life tables.
 - Based on SRS data, life tables have been prepared for the periods 1970-75, 1976-80, 1981-85 and 1986-90 at five yearly intervals. Since the 1986-90 issue, life tables have been brought out annually on a **five yearly moving average basis so as to form a continuous series.**
- **Use:**
 - It is a **conventional method of expressing the most fundamental and essential facts about the age distribution of mortality** and is a powerful tool for measuring the probability of life and death of various age groups.
 - It **enables us to understand the implication of age-specific mortality rate** in terms of average life expectancy. In India, it has been the practice to construct life tables using age composition of the population from successive population censuses.

4. India-Russia Foreign Ministers Meet

Why in News

To build on the common “resilient” ground, Indian and Russian Foreign Ministers addressed each other’s concerns on a wide range of issues.

- The issues range from **defence supplies to the S-400 air defence system, India’s role in Afghanistan and Taliban’s involvement in power-sharing to cooperation on Covid vaccines and India’s participation in the Quad grouping.**

Key Points

- **Discussed Cooperation in Following Sectors:**
 - Economic opportunities in the **Russian Far East.**
 - The Russian Far East stretches from **Lake Baikal, the world’s largest freshwater lake, to the Pacific Ocean** and comprises roughly a third of Russia’s territory.
 - Although it is **rich in natural resources** including minerals, hydrocarbons, timber and fish, it is an **economically underdeveloped** region.
 - Leveraging the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** campaign to boost manufacturing in India.
 - Connectivity through the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).**
 - **INSTC** is a multi-modal transportation established in September 2000 in St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation.
 - The **Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern maritime corridor.**
 - It is a **maritime route** covering approximately 5,600 nautical miles, aimed at increasing bilateral trade between India and Russia.
 - Long standing partnership in **space and nuclear sectors.**
- **S-400 Air Defence System:**
 - Issues regarding the sale of the **S-400 air defence system** figured in the discussions.
 - The S-400 Triumf is a mobile, **surface-to-air missile system (SAM)** designed by Russia.
 - It is the most dangerous operationally deployed **modern long-range SAM (MLR SAM)** in the world, considered much ahead of the **US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).**

- While India is keen on buying it, the USA has expressed reservations by threatening sanctions under **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**.
- **Views on Military Alliance and Indo-Pacific:**
 - **Military Alliance:**
 - Russian Foreign Minister clarified that the **Russia-China relations** are at the highest in the history, but these relations **do not pursue a goal of establishing a military alliance**.
 - He also **referred to the Quad grouping** and called it an **"Asian NATO"**, a term sometimes used by China.
 - **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is an informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a **"free, open and prosperous"** Indo-Pacific region.
 - **Indo-Pacific:**
 - Russia and India are working for **stability and connectivity in the Asia-Pacific** and urged that **"military alliances"** should not come up in Asia.
 - Russia referred to the formulation of **"Asia Pacific"** while India referred to **"Indo-Pacific"**.
- **Afghan Peace:**
 - There is a need to **"harmonise" the interests of various stakeholders** that are active in and around Afghanistan.
 - The **peace process** should be based on foundational principles and a political solution should mean **independent, sovereign, united and democratic Afghanistan**.
 - Decision on the settlement in Afghanistan should foresee the **participation of all political, ethnic and religious groups** in the country. Otherwise the solution will not be stable.
 - It needs to be noted that India was not a part of a recent meeting led by Russia on Afghan peace.
- **Medical Cooperation:**
 - The Russian Fund for Direct Investment has signed contracts with various Indian manufacturers for **Sputnik V vaccines** for 700-750 million doses.
 - Both ministers also took up the possible export of the **Covaxin** to Russia which is likely to be cleared by experts.

India - Russia Relations

- **Political (Annual Summit):** The Annual Summit meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of the Russian Federation is the highest

institutionalized dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between India and Russia.

- **Economic:** India-Russia trade, amounting to **USD 10.11 billion in 2019-2020**, is far below the potential. Both countries have **set the bilateral trade target at USD 30 billion by 2025**.
- **Defence and Security:** **BrahMos Missile System** as well as the licensed production in India of **SU-30 aircraft and T-90 tanks**, are examples.
- **Cooperation in Nuclear Energy:** **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)** is being built in India with Russian cooperation.
- **Cooperation in Space Sector:** Cooperation in **Gaganyaan program**.
- **Common Multilateral Forums:**
 - BRICS
 - **Russia-India-China Grouping: RIC**
 - **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**
- **Military Exercises:**
 - **Exercise TSENTR 2019**.
 - **Indra Exercises - Joint Tri-Services (Army, Navy, Air Force) Exercises**.

Way Forward

- **India Engaging Russia Into Indo-Pacific Narrative:** India should pursue and facilitate Russia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Russia's active engagement in the region would contribute to making the Indo-Pacific truly "free and inclusive".
- **Prioritizing RIC in Indian Foreign Policy:** India can also promote a mutually beneficial trilateral cooperation between Russia, China, and India that could contribute towards the reduction of mistrust and suspicion between India and China.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

5. Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to put in place a new programme – Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) – through which it will purchase government securities worth Rs 1 lakh crore in the first quarter of FY22.

What are G-Secs?

- These are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.
- The two key categories are:

1. Treasury bills (T-Bills) – short-term instruments which mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and
2. Dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years

Why G-Secs?

- Like bank fixed deposits, g-secs are not tax-free.
- They are generally considered the safest form of investment because they are backed by the government. So, the risk of default is almost nil.
- However, they are not completely risk-free, since they are subject to fluctuations in interest rates.
- Bank fixed deposits, on the other hand, are guaranteed only to the extent of Rs 5 lakh by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

What benefits does the G-SAP offer?

- G-SAP aims to provide more comfort to the bond market and market participants.
- Market participants say they have always wanted to know the RBI's Open Market Operations (OMO) purchase calendar, and the RBI has now provided that to the market through this announcement on GSAP.
- It will provide certainty to the bond market participants with regard to RBI's commitment of support to the bond market in FY22.
- A structured purchase program of similar size such as this will definitely calm investors' nerves and help market participants to bid better in scheduled auctions and reduce volatility in bond prices.

6. 'Seechewal Model' of wastewater management

A new wastewater treatment plant opened recently in a village in Punjab's Patiala district uses a unique method devised to treat, recycle and reuse wastewater.

Seechewal Model

- The plant in the village of Patiala aims to achieve the following objective using the 'Seechewal Model' of wastewater management:
 1. Recycling and reusing the treated wastewater for irrigation
 2. Preventing further contamination of groundwater
- The model is a pipe-and-pump formula used to remove heavy solid particles, oil and other material from water.

- It was introduced by Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and was first used in Seechewal, Punjab.
- The project aims to implement a combination of processes through four-well systems of wastewater treatment for reuse apart from human consumption.
- The water wells need to be cleaned regularly; otherwise, they produce extremely poor effluents with high suspended solids, which can be detrimental to the constructed wetland and cause clogging of beds.
- To ensure continuous and effective operation, the accumulated material must be emptied periodically.

Benefits offered

- The project will reduce the usage of freshwater by providing an option of treated water to farmers. It will aim at water sustainability with appropriate technologies of water recycle-reuse-recharge.”
- The project has engaged, empowered and evolved community sustained processes for water management and strengthened community collectives.

7. A holistic review of internal security challenge and response to them is needed

Recent setback to internal security (IS) capability

- The COMBING OPERATION by local and central police forces in the Tekulguda region of Bastar went terribly wrong and resulted in the death of 22 security personnel.
- This tragic incident is a major and embarrassing setback to the IS (internal security) capability of India at many levels and highlights the **challenge that LWE (left-wing extremism) continues to pose.**

Strategic inadequacies

- India has been dealing with **three variants of the internal security challenge** for decades.
- These three are: 1) a proxy war and terrorism in Kashmir 2) sub-national separatist movements in the Northeast. 3) the Naxal-Maoist insurgency (LWE) in the Red Corridor.
- And these challenges have warranted different responses.
- The first two strands have been **reasonably contained.**
- LWE and the current Maoist movement has its genesis in poor governance, lack of development in the tribal belt and an oppressive/exploitative hierarchy of the state and society.
- In November 2005, then PM Manmohan Singh described the LWE challenge as the most serious security threat to India and exhorted the professionals to evolve appropriate responses.

Need for restructuring

- One of the recommendations of **the Kargil Review Committee (KRC)** report was the restructuring of the role and the tasks of the para-military forces **particularly with reference to command and control and leadership functions.**
- This critical component of restructuring the leadership of the central police forces (in this case the CRPF and BSF) **has not been addressed, much less redressed.**
- By training, the police officer is expected to be a competent Superintendent and to maintain law and order.
- This is not the skill-set that is relevant when an officer has to “command” and lead his men into insurgency operations.
- In the current scenario, barring a few exceptions, many of the senior police officers (IPS cadre) who are introduced into the central police forces at senior ranks **have little or no platoon/battalion experience.**

Conclusion

- The political leadership of the country needs to act and complete the task of restructuring and capacity building to address India’s internal security challenge.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to Asian Giant Softshell Turtle:

1. It is a freshwater turtle occurring in eastern and southern India.
2. It is classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List.
3. It is also called the frog-faced softshell turtle.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Asian Giant Softshell Turtle is also known as Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle and the frog-faced softshell turtle.
- It is a species of freshwater turtle and is native to Southeast Asia.
- It is classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List.
- It has been considered to be among the largest extant freshwater turtles.
- It occurs in southern and eastern India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Philippines and Indonesia.

2. Which of the following reports are released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):

1. Investment Trends Monitor Report
2. Global Financial Stability Report
3. Technology and Innovation Report
4. The Least Developed Countries Report

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 2 and 3 only
- B 3 and 4 only
- C 1, 3 and 4
- D 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer : C

Explanation

- **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** is a permanent intergovernmental body established in 1964.
 - It is headquartered at Geneva in Switzerland.
 - UNCTAD promotes development-friendly integration of developing countries into the world economy.
- **Reports Published:**
 - **Investment Trends Monitor Report**
 - Trade and Development Report
 - World Investment Report
 - **The Least Developed Countries Report**
 - Information and Economy Report
 - **Technology and Innovation Report**
 - Commodities and Development Report
- The Global Financial Stability Report is released by the **International Monetary Fund**. Hence, option C is correct.

3. National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) was constituted for hearing appeals against the orders passed by?

1. National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)
2. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)
3. Competition Commission of India (CCI)

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : d

Explanation:

- Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated the Chennai Bench of National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) through virtual mode recently.
- The Chennai Bench of NCLAT shall have jurisdiction to hear the Appeals arising out of the orders passed by the benches of NCLT having jurisdiction of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Lakshwadeep and Puducherry.

- Two Members of NCLAT, New Delhi, Hon'ble Shri. Balvinder Singh, Member (Technical) and Hon'ble. Shri. Justice Venugopal M. have taken charge of the newly constituted Chennai Bench of the NCLAT.
- Five new Benches of NCLT have been announced at Jaipur, Cuttack, Kochi, Indore and Amaravati, bringing the total number of Benches to 16 (including the Principal Bench).
- The NCLAT now functions at a strength of 5 courts, 4 at the Principal Bench in New Delhi and the 5th at NCLAT, Chennai.

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)

- It was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT).
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC).
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India under Section 202 and Section 211 of IBC.
- NCLAT is also the Appellate Tribunal to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

4. Consider the following statements about Green Tax:

1. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will levy a green tax on transport vehicles older than eight years.
2. CNG-vehicles, tractors and harvesters will be charged comparatively lower green tax.

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 **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** will levy a **green tax on transport vehicles older than eight years at the time of renewal of fitness certificate** at the rate of 10% to 25% of road tax. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

- The revenue collected through the green tax will be kept in a different account and will only be utilised for tackling pollution.
- Vehicles like strong hybrids, electric vehicles and those running on alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol and LPG and **vehicles used in farming, such as tractor, harvesters and tillers will be exempted** from the green tax. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- Differential Taxation:
 - Personal vehicles are proposed to be charged green tax at the time of renewal of registration certification after 15 years.
 - **Public transport vehicles, such as city buses, will be charged lower green tax.**
 - Higher green tax (50% of road tax) will be levied on vehicles being registered in highly polluted cities.
 - Differential tax will also be charged depending on fuel (petrol/ diesel) and the type of vehicles.

5. Bharat Parv an annual event happens in Delhi is organised by?

- a. Ministry of Human Resource and Development
- b. Ministry of Defence
- c. Ministry of External Affairs
- d. Ministry of Tourism

Answer : d

Explanation:

Bharat Parv

- It will be celebrated every year from 26th to 31st January, 2020 in New Delhi.
- It aims to encourage Indians to visit different tourist places of India and to inculcate the spirit of 'Dekho Apna Desh'.
- It includes highlights of the Republic Day Parade Tableaux, performances by the Armed Forces Bands, theme pavilions of different States and Central Ministries and cultural performances from different regions of the country.

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Akash-NG Missile

1. It is a new generation Surface to Air Missile meant for use by the Indian Air Force.
2. This new generation missile was powered by Ramjet Engine with a range up to 30 km.

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 : a

Explanation:

- DRDO has recently conducted the successful maiden launch of Akash-NG (New Generation) Missile from Integrated Test Range off the coast of Odisha.

Akash-NG Missile

- It is a new generation Surface to Air Missile meant for use by Indian Air Force with an aim of intercepting high maneuvering low Radar Cross Section (RCS) aerial threats.
- It weighs only half of the existing Akash missile and requires fewer ground systems.
- The existing Akash missile has a range of 25 km, while the upgraded variant (NG) can strike targets at a distance of 30 km.
- The missile, already in service in the Indian military, has an indigenous content of 96%.
- The missile was inducted into the Indian Air Force in 2014 and in the army a year later.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. India's 'Act East Policy' is strategically complementary to South Korea's 'New Southern Policy' in the Indo-Pacific. Examine the advantages, potential and challenges of India South Korea bilateral ties in this context. (250 words)

Approach

- Explain in brief the objectives of two policies
- Examine the advantages, potential and challenges of India South Korea bilateral ties.

2Q. Salt satyagraha was more than just a symbolic act of breaking the salt law, that shook an empire. Examine (150 words)

Approach

- Give brief introduction by mentioning chronological facts about salt satyagraha.
- Bring out the essence of satyagraha by linking it to broader Gandhian methods.
- Give conclusion.