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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. U.S. denies vaccine inputs ban

Context:

- Covishield vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India (SII) had appealed to the U.S. administration to lift the embargo on raw material export to assist the production of COVID-19 vaccines.

Background:

Emergency legislation:

- **The U.S. is a major source of raw materials in vaccine production.**
- The **U.S.'s Defense Production Act** – an emergency law that requires domestic manufacturers to **prioritize federal (central) government purchase orders** – has resulted in a short supply of vital raw materials in the open market.
 - The act is aimed to expand domestic vaccine manufacturing and prioritize quick vaccination of Americans.

Details:

- The U.S. administration has **denied any 'outright bans' on the export of vaccine raw materials.**

Attempts at resolving the situation:

- India has expressed specific concerns raised by vaccine manufacturers and the U.S. officials have said they will “positively consider” the concerns raised by the Indian side.
- India and the U.S. have alluded to **cooperation on “COVID-19” or “health”** during the recent phone call between the foreign ministers of the two countries.

2. 'Border situation cannot be swept under carpet'

Context:

- Statement by the envoys of India and China during their interactions with academicians and experts as part of the **track 2 diplomacy efforts**.

Background:

Talks deadlocked:

- Talks between military commanders appear to remain **deadlocked over carrying forward disengagement in the Gogra and Hot Springs areas** following the completion of the first phase at Pangong Lake.
- Recently, China's state media reported the **deployment of an advanced long-range rocket launcher** to the border with India.

China's stand:

On border issue:

- Though the Chinese envoy acknowledged the fact that the boundary dispute should be given sufficient attention and taken seriously, he argued that the **boundary question is not the whole story of China-India relations** and it should be put at a proper place in the overall bilateral relations.

On multilateralism:

- China has called on India to abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core and an international order based on international law and **reject 'small circles'**, a phrase some Chinese experts have used to refer to groupings such as the **Quad**.

India's stand:

On border issue:

- India's envoy to China has stated that unlike the popular tendency in some quarters to characterize the border face-off between the two neighbours as just a minor issue, **maintaining peace and tranquillity at the border is very essential to take forward India's ties with China**.
- India and China should **work towards early resolution of the border crisis** as a resolution of the long-pending issue is inevitable to develop a closer development partnership between the two countries.

On multilateralism:

- Indian envoy stressed the importance of **multipolarity in the changed geo-political scenario**, both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond and has reiterated that in such a multipolar world, no country can set the agenda by itself without prior agreement and consultation.

3. PM cancels Europe trip, amid surge

- In the light of the surge of COVID-19 cases in India, the Indian Prime Minister has cancelled his travel to Europe to take part in the planned India-EU summit in **Porto, Portugal**.
- The **India-EU Leaders' Meeting in the EU+27 format**, was the first time that such a meeting was being planned, reflecting the shared ambition of both sides to further deepen the strategic partnership.

Agenda:

- Finalization of the long-pending **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** between India and the EU.
- Agreement on **cooperation on the Indo-Pacific strategy**.
- Co-operation on **climate action, promoting human rights, building connectivity, sustainable trade and defending a multilateral international order**.

4. Kulbhushan Jadhav Case

Why in News

Pakistan has urged India to appoint a lawyer to represent death row convict Kulbhushan Jadhav to implement the verdict of the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**.

Key Point

- **About the Kulbhushan Jadhav Case:**
 - Kulbhushan Jadhav was **sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court** on charges of espionage and terrorism in **April 2017**.
 - **India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of consular access (Vienna Convention)** to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

- ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an “effective review and reconsideration” of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav, and also grant consular access to India without further delay.
 - It had asked Pakistan to provide a proper forum for appeal against the sentence given to Jadhav by the military court.
- **Implications of 'Effective Review and Reconsideration' for India:**
 - Effective review and reconsideration is a phrase which is different from ‘review’ as one understands in a domestic course.
 - It includes giving consular access and helping Jadhav in preparing his defence.
 - It means that Pakistan has to disclose the charges and also the evidence which it has been absolutely opaque about uptill now.
 - Pakistan would also have to disclose the circumstances in which Jadhav’s confession was extracted by the military.
 - It implies that Jadhav will have a right to defend whichever forum or court hears his case.
- **Vienna Convention:**
 - The **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** is an international treaty that defines consular relations between independent states.
 - A consul (who is not a diplomat), is a representative of a foreign state in a host country, who works for the interests of his countrymen.
 - **Article 36 of the Vienna Convention** states that foreign nationals who are arrested or detained in the host country must be given notice without delay of their right to have their embassy or consulate notified of that arrest.
 - If the detained foreign national so requests, the police must fax that notice to the embassy or consulate, which can then verify the detained person.
 - The notice to the consulate can be as simple as a fax, giving the person's name, the place of arrest, and, if possible, something about the reason for the arrest or detention.

International Court of Justice

- ICJ is a principal judicial organization of the United Nations (UN). It was established in 1945 by a UN Charter and began working in 1946 as the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice.
- It settles legal disputes between member countries and gives advisory opinions to authorized UN Organs and Specialized Agencies.
- An Indian, Judge Dalveer Bhandari has been a member of the ICJ since April 2012.
- It is seated in the Peace Palace of Hague, Netherlands.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. U.S. currency watchlist an intrusion into policy: official

Context:

- Indian Commerce Secretary's statement on the **U.S. government's decision to put India on the watchlist for currency manipulators** as being an intrusion into the policy space of the central bank.

Background:

- The United States has retained India among many other countries on its currency manipulation watchlist.
 - India was added to the list for a second time in December 2020. It was first added to the list in December 2018 and later removed in 2019.

Reasons for retaining India on the watchlist:

High dollar purchases:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has purchased dollars' worth close to 5% of India's gross domestic product.

Trade surplus:

- **India enjoys a trade surplus** of \$20 billion or more with the U.S.
- India's trade surplus with the U.S. grew by about \$5 billion to **\$23 billion in 2020-21**, from around \$18 billion in the previous fiscal year, as imports fell more sharply than exports in the COVID-affected year.

India's stand:

- The RBI has been only taking necessary steps to **maintain stability in the financial markets** and not accumulating forex reserves like China did in the past.
- The central bank's activity in the foreign exchange market has been perfectly balanced and completely legitimate within the accepted monetary policy mandate of central banks across the world.
 - It is a **mandate of the central bank to provide stability in the currency** as a result of which central banks buy and sell foreign currency.

- The U.S. move to list India on the currency manipulator watchlist amounts to an **intrusion into the policy space of central banks.**

6. The long battle against the Maoists

Context:

- The recent **encounter between security forces and the Maoists** in Sukma, a Maoist stronghold in Chhattisgarh in which 22 jawans were killed.

Concerns:

- The article discusses some of the major concerns associated with the Maoist movement and the governmental efforts to counter the movement.

Determination:

- Despite several reversals in the recent past, Maoists have time and again targeted security forces at will.
- They have been able to strike at security forces and indulge in indiscriminate killing from time to time.

Objectives:

- The demands made by the Maoists apart from a call for the formation of a 'people's government', also includes an armed struggle to overthrow the popularly elected governments. These are **secessionist in nature, which no constitutionally elected establishment will ever concede to.**

Tactics:

- The Maoists continue to operate from their forest hideouts, periodically targeting security forces. They also indulge in intoxicating the local populace with **anti-establishment propaganda.**

Assistance being received by Maoists:

- The Maoists continue to **receive assistance in terms of weaponry** from various sources.

Lack of an all-out approach:

- What has worked to the Maoists' advantage is the fact that many states cannot give undivided attention to the task of eradicating extremism. All that the Central and State governments often do to step up their operations is to deploy more policemen and pour in more money and improve technology, but this has an impact only for a short span of time.
- This focus seems to dissipate over time with an element of fatigue arising in the government's efforts.

Way forward:

Developmental push:

- Many experts have put forward the argument that **rapid economic development** of a region can help lure people away from extremist ideology and also help cut the popular support that the extremists receive from the local population.

Need for dedicated leadership at local levels:

- **Andhra Pradesh, especially the Srikakulam district**, is an apt example where a developmental push has helped address the challenge posed by Naxals. A dedicated leadership at the district and grassroots levels had played a vital role in the district and there is a need to ensure a similar approach in other Naxal affected areas as well.

Inducting locals into security forces:

- Inducting local youth into the security forces would help in fighting the extremists.
 - The **Greyhounds, raised in Andhra Pradesh in 1989**, is a successful example of the induction of local youth into security forces to help counter the Naxalites.
- This would not only help the states reduce their over-dependence on Central forces but will also offer the forces some operative advantage given the locals' awareness of the local topography.

7. A low-carbon future through sector-led change

Context:

- The upcoming ‘Leaders’ Climate Summit’ being organised by the United States has led to a lot of conversation around a ‘net-zero’ emissions target for all countries including developing countries like India.

Background:

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1.5°C report called for global carbon emissions to reach net-zero by 2050. This has led to a rising call for all countries to announce 2050 as the net-zero target year.

India’s dilemma:

Developmental needs and climate justice:

- Given the historic emissions by developed countries and the fact that they have taken up a disproportionate share of the carbon space, it is fair enough to expect them to take greater ambitious targets when it comes to climate action.
- The higher targets by the more financially and technologically able developed countries will enable the developing countries to have some additional time for climate action while in the meantime they can focus on their developmental needs.
- **India should not lose sight of its own developmental needs** while taking up GHG mitigation measures. India continues to **face a significant development deficit** – India’s per-capita carbon emissions are less than half the world average.

Climate vulnerability of India:

- **India is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries** and this necessitates India to up its climate action and climate ambitions.

Way forward for India:

- Given that India can neither limit itself to only modest steps until richer countries do more given the context of a global climate crisis, **nor can India go ahead and announce a 2050 net-zero commitment** taking a much heavier burden of decarbonisation than many wealthier countries, and seriously compromising India’s development needs, there is the need for a more **balanced approach when it comes to climate action**.
- India should adopt a **sector-led, action-based approach** that could provide the framework to drive the **low-carbon transformation of India**.

Short term:

- India should initially focus more on near-term sectoral transformations through the **adoption of the latest technologies** that are within reach.
- India should **avoid high carbon lock-ins**.
- There is a need to focus on sectoral low-carbon development pathways that **combine competitiveness, job-creation, distributional justice and low pollution**.
- Such an approach would be directionally consistent with India moving towards net-zero emissions.

Long term:

- In the long term, India should **move towards net-zero emissions**. Over time, India can and should get more specific about future economy-wide net-zero targets and dates.

Electricity sector:

- The article discusses measures that can be taken in the electricity sector.

De-carbonizing power sector:

- De-carbonizing the electricity sector is a critical measure to achieve net-zero emissions.
 - The **electricity sector is the single largest source (about 40%) of India's greenhouse gas emissions**.

Renewable energy:

- There have been laudable efforts in the electricity sector focused on expanding renewable electricity capacity.
 - The targets have been set at **175GW of renewable capacity by 2022 and 450GW of renewable capacity by 2030**.

Coal sector:

- Apart from expanding renewables, India also needs to focus on limiting the expansion of coal-based electricity capacity.
 - **Coal accounts for almost 75% of electricity generation**.
- India should consider pledging that it will not grow its coal-fired power capacity beyond what is already announced, and reach peak coal electricity capacity by 2030, while striving to **make coal-based generation cleaner and more efficient**.
- Apart from GHG mitigation, the ceiling of coal capacity would also **aid control air pollution**. Such a pledge would also give full scope for the

development of renewable energy and storage, and send a strong signal to investors.

- Considering the significance of the coal sector in the economic as well as social development, it would be necessary to create a **multi-stakeholder Just Transition Commission** representing all levels of government and the affected communities to ensure decent livelihood opportunities beyond coal in India's coal belt. This move will help ensure that the transition costs to a low-carbon future would not fall on the backs of India's poor.

Addressing the challenges of distribution companies:

- A low-carbon electricity future cannot be realised without addressing the existing problems of the distribution companies (DISCOMS). This would require **sufficient financing as well as reforms in their structure** as well as their functioning patterns.

Developing requisite technology:

- India will need to work towards becoming a leader in technologies of the future such as **electricity storage, smart grids**, and technologies that enable the electrification of other sectors such as transportation.
- This would necessitate a well-planned **partnership with the private sector**, including tools such as production-linked incentives.
- India should develop a strategic road map to enhance its own technology and manufacturing competence as part of the **global clean energy supply chain**, to gain benefits of employment and export revenues.
- India could in fact use this electricity transition to aim for job creation and global competitiveness in these key areas.

Improving energy efficiency:

- Enhancing the efficiency of electricity use is an important complement to decarbonising the electricity supply.
 - **Air conditioners, fans and refrigerators together consume about 60% of the electricity in households.**
- The energy efficiency programmes apart from looking into electrical appliances should also focus on the development of green buildings.
- In addition to reducing green house gas emissions, this would have the benefit of lowering consumer electricity bills. India can leverage this transition too as an opportunity to become a global leader in the production of clean appliances.

Conclusion:

- A similar integrated approach as discussed above should also be adopted for other sectors.
- Such a sector-by-sector approach, which can and should be developed for other sectors, can demonstrate concrete, yet ambitious, domestic action that sets India on the path toward net-zero emissions.
- Additionally, such an approach also offers the following advantages:
 - It could allow India to insist on developed countries to complement their distant net-zero targets by enacting concrete near-term measures.
 - This approach allows India to nimbly adapt its sectoral transition plans as technologies mature and enable it to **ratchet up its pledges periodically as required by the Paris Agreement.**
 - This would allow India adequate time to undertake detailed assessments of its development needs and low-carbon opportunities, the possible pace of technological developments, the seriousness of the net-zero actions by developed countries to prescribe its very own climate action pledges.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Need to make structural changes to our largest health insurance and pension schemes

The idea of welfare state

- Covid reminds us that a modern state is a welfare state as governments worldwide launched **1,600 plus new social protection programmes in 2020.**
- Sustainable social security lies in raising **India's 138th ranking in country per-capita GDP.**
- However, on the social security schemes, there is a case for three reforms to our biggest **health insurance and pension schemes:**
- These schemes are the **Employee State Insurance Scheme (ESIS)** and **Employee Provident Fund (EPF).**

Issues with ESIS

- The Employee State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) is India's richest and biggest health insurance scheme with **13 crore people covered and Rs 80,000 crore in cash**.
- Employers with more than **10 employees** make a mandatory 4 per cent payroll deduction for **employees earning up to Rs 21,000 per month**.
- Despite covering roughly 10 per cent of India's population, a recent working paper from **Dvara Research** suggests high dissatisfaction.
- The constraint is hardly resources: **ESIC's unspent reserves** are larger than the Central government's healthcare budgetary allocation.

Issues with EPF

- EPF is India's biggest pension scheme with a Rs 12 lakh crore corpus and 6.5 crore contributors.
- Employers with **more than 20 employees** make mandatory 24 per cent payroll deductions for employees earning up to **Rs 15,000 per month**.
- It only covers **10 per cent of India's labour force** and 60 per cent of accounts and 50 per cent of registered employers are inactive.
- EPF **offers poor service and pathetic technology** despite **employer-funded administrative costs** that make it the world's most expensive government securities mutual fund.

Updating the risk-sharing frameworks in society

- In a book titled *What We Owe Each Other: A New Social Contract*, Nemat Shafik suggests updating the risk-sharing framework in societies.
- This is because **current structures are breaking up** under the weight of changes in the role of women, longer careers, technology, globalisation, and much else.
- She suggests a more nuanced **social security redistribution** across time (the piggy bank function), incomes (the Robin Hood function), and financial burden-bearing (the state, individuals, or employers).
- In India, the answer lies in fixing the problems of EPF and ESIS.

Solution to the EPF and ESIS problems

- Both suffer from poor coverage, high costs, unsatisfied customers, metrics confused with goals, jail provisions, excessive corruption, low expertise, rude and unaccountable staff with no fear of falling or hope of rising, and no competition.

Let's look at possible solutions.

1) Structure

- EPF and ESIS combine the roles of **policymaker, regulator, and service provider.**
- **Splitting roles** is a precondition for performance because goals, strategy, and skills are different.
- An independent policymaker horrified with only 6 lakh of India's 6.3 crore enterprises covered would create competition.
- An independent regulator terrified by ESIS overcharging would frown on a **claims ratio of less than 75 per cent.**
- An independent service provider would **invest heavily in technology, customer service, and human capital.**
- Splitting roles would lead to the following benefits:
- **1) Competition from NPS for EPF.**
- 2) Ending VIP opt-out by merging CGHS with ESIS,
- 3) Raising enforceability by making employee provident fund contribution voluntary.
- 4) **Improving portability** by de-linking accounts from employers.
- 5) Targeting **universalisation** by simultaneously ending minimum employer head-count and employee salary contribution thresholds while introducing absolute contribution caps.
- The Health and Finance Ministry would be logical homes for ESIS and EPF policy roles.

2) Governance

- The governing board of ESIS and EPFO have **59 and 33 members respectively.**
- Such a large group can't have meaningful discussions, make decisions, and exercise oversight.
- This governance deficit needs smaller boards (not more than 15), age limits, term limits, expertise, active sub-committees (HR, Investments, and technology) and real powers.

3) Leadership

- Health and pensions need complex skills developed over time.
- Yet, ESIS and EPF are led by **generalist bureaucrats.**
- Both organisations need professional chief executives.
- Philosopher Isaiah Berlin's framing of the generalist vs specialist debate as hedgehogs (who know one thing) and foxes (who know many things) is important.
- A less generalist, non-transitory, and non-cadred chief executive would create a new tone-from-the-top around performance management, technology, and service outcomes.

Conclusion

Social security – not a borrowing binge that steals from our grandchildren – can blunt structural and COVID inequality when combined with complementary policies like formalisation, financialisation, urbanisation, and better government schools. But a great place to start is three flick-of-pen, non-fiscal reforms at EPF and ESIS.

2. SC paves way for appointment of ad-hoc judges in HCs

Appointment of retired judges under Article 224A

- The Supreme Court cleared the way for appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in High Courts under Article 224A of the Constitution.
- The court ruled that the Chief Justice of a High Court may initiate the process of recommending a name if the number of judges' vacancies is more than 20 per cent of the sanctioned strength.
- The court said the appointments can follow the procedure laid down in the Memorandum of Procedure for appointment of judges.
- The move will help to deal with **mounting backlog of cases**.
- Since the nominees have been judges before, the need to refer the matter to the IB or other agencies would not arise, **shortening the time period**.

3. Supreme Court sets timeline for Govt to clear judges' names

Why the timeline

- The Supreme Court laid down a timeline for the Centre to clear names **recommended by the High Court Collegiums**.
- The Bench noted that **there are almost 40% vacancies** in the High Courts, with many of the larger High Courts working under 50% of their sanctioned strength.
- Against the sanctioned strength of **1,080 High Court Judges**, 664 have been appointed but **416 vacancies remain**.
- The Bench rejected the contention that laying down a timeline "would be contrary to" certain "observations made in the **Third Judges case**", saying the

“observations” referred to “deal with the judicial review of a particular appointment and not such aspects of the appointment process like delay”.

The timeline

- The Intelligence Bureau (IB) should submit its report/ inputs within 4 to 6 weeks from the date of recommendation of the High Court Collegium, to the Central Government.
- It would be desirable that the Central Government forward the file(s)/ recommendations to the Supreme Court **within 8 to 12 weeks** from the date of receipt of views from the State Government and the report/ input from the IB.
- It would be for the Government to thereafter proceed to make the appointment immediately on the aforesaid consideration and undoubtedly, if Government has any reservations on **suitability or in public interest**, within the same period of time it may be sent back to the Supreme Court Collegium with the specific reasons for reservation recorded.
- If the Supreme Court Collegium, after consideration of the aforesaid inputs, still reiterates the recommendation(s) unanimously..., such appointment should be processed and **appointment should be made within 3 to 4 weeks**.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4. Chimera Research: Human Cells in Monkey Embryos

Why in News

Recently, researchers at the **Salk Institute for Biological Studies in the US** in a research called **Chimera Research** have for the first time grown human cells in monkey embryos.

Key Points

- **About the Research:**
 - **By integrating human cells into the embryos of macaque monkeys, a chimeric tool** has been created.
 - **Chimeras** are organisms that are **made up of the cells of two distinct species**, in this case humans and monkeys.

- For instance, if this hybrid embryo was placed in the womb of a monkey, **it could possibly grow into a new kind of an animal** (however this was not the aim of this study).
- **Purpose of the Research:**
 - **Understanding Human Development & Drug Evaluation:**
 - Ability to grow cells of two different species together offers scientists a **powerful tool for research and medicine**, advancing current understanding about early human development, disease onset and progression and ageing.
 - It could also **help in drug evaluation and address the critical need for organ transplantation.**
 - **Provides New Platform to Study Diseases:**
 - Chimeric tools provide a new platform to study **how certain diseases arise**. For instance, a particular gene that is associated with a certain type of cancer could be engineered in a human cell.
 - It can help in **studying the course of disease progression** using the engineered cells in a chimeric model, which may be able to tell them more about the disease than results obtained from an animal model.
- **Reason for Choosing Macaque:**
 - In a 2017 study, researchers **integrated human cells into pig tissues** as they thought that pigs, whose organ size, physiology and anatomy are similar to that of humans, could help them in creating organs that could ultimately be transplanted to humans.
 - As the **experiment failed** due to **evolutionary distance between pigs and humans** (about 90 million years) the researchers **decided to pick a species that was more closely related to humans**, hence macaque monkeys were chosen.
- **Concerns:**
 - **Not Natural and have Survival Issue:**
 - Some rare hybrid animals exist naturally and were probably the result of **unintentional cross breeding** between animals of different species.
 - In 2014, a rare hybrid animal called **Geep (Goat+Sheep)** was born in an Irish farm. Geep was a hybrid between a goat and a sheep, a result of the two mating.
 - Generally, different species don't cross-breed and if they do, their **offspring don't survive** for long and are prone to infertility.
 - **Infertility:**
 - **Mules** are another example of a hybrid animal that are the result of mating between a female horse and a male donkey.

- As per the American Mule Museum, **these hybrid animals are the result of intentional breeding by humans**, which they first undertook in the ancient times.
- While mules can live a long healthy life, **they are infertile** which means that they cannot have offspring of their own.
- **Injustice Against Animals for Human Benefit:**
 - Although researchers have made it clear that the chimeras created with macaques will not be used for human organs still **there is skepticism since others feel that one of the goals of chimera research is to create organs that can be transplanted to humans.**
 - Chimera research **has the potential to worsen injustice against animals** and also point out the fairness in using part-human animals to meet human needs.
 - In 2018 a scientist in China claimed to have produced genetically modified babies using the gene editing technique **CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats)**. He was sentenced to prison for three years, with a fine of 3 million yuan (approx. Rs 3 crore), for illegal medical practice.
- **Indian Laws on Hybrid Animals:**
 - In India production of hybrid animals has been banned since 1985..
 - **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)** and the products are regulated under the **“Rules for the manufacture, use, import, export & storage of hazardous microorganisms, genetically engineered organisms or cells, 1989”** (referred to as Rules, 1989) notified under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.**
 - These Rules are **implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Department of Biotechnology and State Governments** through six competent authorities.
 - The Rules, 1989 are **supported by a series of guidelines** on contained research, biologics, confined field trials, food safety assessment, environmental risk assessment etc.

Way Forward

- Genetic modification like chimera studies continues to be a **subject of major debate**. In developing countries like India, **genetically modified crops are also a contentious topic.**
- Tampering with the genetic code in human beings is more controversial, as **any such change can be passed down to future generations.**

5. Towards digital Atmanirbharta

E-commerce as an enabler

- With their **efficient, quick and reliable logistics network**, e-commerce platforms have nudged consumer behaviour patterns from an offline to an online shopping mode.
- During the pandemic, e-commerce emerged as an enabler in ensuring the availability of essentials to the masses.
- E-commerce is going to be increasingly important in the future of retail shopping in India and the world over.
- It is estimated to become a **\$100 billion industry by 2024**, which was at \$38.5 billion until 2017.
- The trend will continue to grow with the government's impetus on **digital literacy**, also supported by the increasing penetration of internet and smartphone users.
- However, what the sector lacks is **the bandwidth of operation**.

Issues with FDI policy for e-commerce

- In addition to the **FDI Policy/FEMA**, other laws such as IT Act, Consumer Protection Act, and those pertaining to IP and copyright, regulate the e-commerce sector in India.
- Of these, the **FDI policy plays an important role** as massive investments are needed to build and strengthen the entire ecosystem of the e-commerce sector in the country.
- FDI policies on trade have evolved over time as policy-making was done from time to time mostly responding to the needs of the market coupled with political feasibility.
- Thus, FDI policy in cash and carry or **wholesale B2B operations** is different (100 per cent FDI allowed under automatic route) compared to highly restrictive FDI policy on **retail B2C trade**.
- Similarly, an artificial distinction was created between **single-brand retail and multi-brand retail** as opposition to multi-brand retail was strong: 100 per cent FDI is allowed under automatic route in single-brand retail whereas FDI regime in multi-brand retail is quite restricted.
- E-commerce is **not allowed under FDI policy in multi-brand retail**.
- The FDI policy on e-commerce is quite different as e-commerce platforms are allowed to **work only as a marketplace** with permission to provide certain specified services to sellers and buyers.
- However, **FDI is allowed in the inventory model** when these platforms **sell fresh farm produce made in India**.
- There is **no specific policy on FDI in e-commerce for exports**.

Need for comprehensive FDI policy for trade

- The rapid expansion of the retail, organised retail as well e-commerce sector in India in the coming years will create huge opportunities for all.
- The policies that have evolved over time need a relook to **balance the interests of all in a win-win policy.**
- Today, our small businesses employing an exceptionally large number of workers need to **use e-commerce more and more to augment their sales.**
- E-commerce provides them with the **means to access a much bigger market** without having to overly invest in marketing. This should include more and more foreign markets.
- Consumers have benefited enormously from e-commerce.
- Also, the harmonious working of online and offline retailers is essential.
- With GST and the drive towards digitisation, more small traders need to be enabled to make the transition and take advantage of the expanding opportunities.

Conclusion

Public policy on e-commerce needs to place an equal premium on the views and interests of all the stakeholders in the ecosystem to strengthen our domestic businesses and create many more jobs and livelihood opportunities in the country to fulfil the dreams of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

6. Politics, geography and demography shape Naxal movement

Two approaches to explain Naxal movement

1) Root cause and alienation approach

- The recent attack in and around Tekulagudem village in Sukma district demonstrates the threat posed by Maoists.
- The post-incident analysis of such setbacks comes in two flavours.
- The most popular theory amongst our intelligentsia and media is the **root cause and alienation approach.**
- This approach states that it is **the failure of the Indian state to provide economic development and social justice** to the tribals living in these areas that has fuelled the Naxal movement and sustained it for five decades.
- As a prescription, a development-centric approach and negotiations are suggested as the way forward.

Issues with root cause and alienation approach

- There are several problems with this approach.
- First, it ignores the ideological foundations of the movement, specifically its rejection of India's Constitution and democracy.
- Second, it fails to see that **social and economic deprivation is not unique to the jungles of Chhattisgarh.**
- Third, it doesn't account for the possibility that while **alienation and deprivation** may help in igniting the spark of revolution, once lit the flames draw oxygen from many sources.
- Fourth, **the role of external forces** in fomenting and sustaining this movement is deliberately underplayed.
- Fifth, the grubby ground reality of the **praxis of revolution** is conveniently swept under the carpet.
- The organised extortion racket from all economic stakeholders in the Naxal-affected areas by our alienated revolutionaries seldom gets talked about.
- Sixth, the extensive **ideological, financial and logistical ecosystem** that provides sustenance to these revolutionaries in the jungle is seldom acknowledged.

2) Leadership issue

- According to this view, our tactical failures against the Maoists are entirely **due to the poor quality of leadership** provided by the Indian Police Service.
- The when, where, how of a setback simply don't matter.
- When in doubt, identify the first IPS officer in the chain of command and hoist him on the petard of tactical incompetence.
- This view **completely ignores the many successes of IPS leadership** in counterinsurgency operations in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and most recently in Odisha.
- Even in the Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir, where the Indian Army provides the **backbone of the counterinsurgency grid**, the police forces of the respective states and their IPS leadership play a crucial role in gathering intelligence and in executing operations.
- So, the failures and setbacks in the Naxal areas of Chhattisgarh need to be placed in perspective.

Way forward

- The fact that the Indian state has adopted a **broad policy of economic development, military restraint and gradual attrition** and rejected indiscriminate violence in the Naxal theatre is the democratically prudent and morally just course of action.
- This hasn't dissuaded Maoist sympathisers from gaining international attention through relentless propaganda against our security forces.

- However, such attacks also help in exposing their true nature and hardening public resolve against them.
- \ We have enough examples of successful, police led CI Ops in our country.
- Why we are not able to replicate these successes in Chhattisgarh is a matter of larger political issues, well beyond the narrow scope of operational tactics and individual lapses of police leadership.
- Not just the politics, the geography and demography of the Naxal-affected areas, make it an even more complex challenge of internal security.

7. U.S. currency watchlist an intrusion into RBI's policy space

Why was India put on the currency watchlist by the US

- The U.S. Treasury Department had recently retained India in a watchlist for currency manipulators submitted to the U.S. Congress.
- It cited higher dollar purchases (close to 5% of the gross domestic product) by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Another trigger for the inclusion in the currency watchlist is a **trade surplus of \$20 billion or more.**

What is India's position

- India had a steady holding pattern of forex reserves 'with ups and downs' based on market-based transactions that central banks may undertake.
- The central bank's activity in the foreign exchange market has been perfectly balanced and completely legitimate within the **accepted monetary policy mandate** of central banks across the world.
- It is a mandate of the central bank to provide stability in the currency as a result of which central banks buy and sell foreign currency.
- Our overall reserves have been fairly steady at \$500 bn to \$600 bn.
- We are not accumulating reserves like China.

8. State of the Global Climate 2020: WMO

Why in News

Recently, the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** released its annual **State of the Global Climate for 2020**.

- The report was released ahead of the **Leaders Summit on Climate**, hosted by the US.
- Extreme weather combined with **Covid-19** was a double blow for millions of people in 2020. However, the **pandemic-related economic slowdown failed to put a brake on climate change drivers and accelerating impacts**.

Key Points

- **Global Temperature:**
 - 2020 was one of the three warmest years on record, despite a cooling **La Niña** event.
 - The global average temperature was about **1.2° Celsius above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level**.
 - The other two warmest years are **2016 and 2019**.
 - The six years since **2015** have been the warmest on record.
 - **2011-2020** was the warmest decade on record.
- **Greenhouse Gases:**
 - **Emission** of major greenhouse gases increased in **2019 and 2020**.
 - It will be **higher** in **2021**.
 - **Concentrations** of the major greenhouse gases in the air **continued to increase in 2019 and 2020**.
 - Globally, averaged **mole fractions** of carbon dioxide (CO₂) have already exceeded 410 parts per million (ppm), and if the CO₂ concentration follows the same pattern as in previous years, it could reach or exceed 414 ppm in 2021.
 - **Mole fraction** represents the **number of molecules of a particular component in a mixture divided by the total number of moles** in the given mixture. It's a way of expressing the concentration of a solution.
- **Oceans:**
 - In 2019, the oceans had the **highest heat content** on record. In 2020, it has broken this record further. **Over 80% of the ocean area experienced at least one marine heatwave in 2020**.
 - A marine heatwave is defined when **seawater temperatures exceed a seasonally-varying threshold for at least 5 consecutive days**.
 - The percentage of the ocean that experienced **“strong” marine heat waves (45%)** was greater than that which experienced **“moderate” marine heat waves (28%)**.
- **Sea-level Rise:**

- Since record-taking started in 1993 using the satellite altimeter, sea-level has been rising. It is **due to the La Niña induced cooling**.
- Sea level has recently been rising at a higher rate **partly due to the increased melting of the ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica**.
- **The Arctic and the Antarctica:**
 - In 2020, **the Arctic sea-ice extent came down to second lowest on record**.
 - The 2020 minimum extent was **3.74 million square kilometre**, marking **only the second time** (after 2012) **on record that it shrank to less than 4 million sq km**.
 - In a large region of the Siberian Arctic, **temperatures in 2020 were more than 3°C above average**.
 - A record temperature of 38°C was noted in the town of **Verkhoyansk, Russia**.
 - The **Antarctic sea-ice extent remained close to the long-term average**.
 - However, the Antarctic ice sheet has exhibited a strong mass loss trend since the late 1990s.
 - This trend accelerated around 2005, and **currently, Antarctica loses approximately 175 to 225 Gigaton per year**, due to the increasing flow rates of major **glaciers** in West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula.
- **Extreme Weather Events in India:**
 - India **experienced one of its wettest monsoons since 1994**, with a seasonal surplus of 9% that led to **severe floods and landslides**.
 - **Cyclone Amphan**, which hit Kolkata in May 2020, has been named as the **costliest tropical cyclone for the North Indian Ocean region** that brought about an estimated loss of USD 14 billion.
- **Climatic Impact:**
 - **Extreme Weather Situations:**
 - Along with the pandemic, people across the world struggled to survive as they faced extreme weather in the form of storms, cyclones, heavy rainfall and record heat.
 - **Response and recovery** to people hit by cyclones, storms and similar extreme weather was **constrained throughout the pandemic in 2020**.
 - **Human Mobility Issues:**
 - Mobility restrictions and economic downturns owing to Covid-19 **slowed down delivery of humanitarian assistance** to vulnerable and displaced populations, who live in dense settlements.
 - The **pandemic added further dimension to human mobility concerns**, highlighting the need for an integrated approach to

understanding and addressing climate risk and impact on vulnerable populations.

World Meteorological Organization

- **About:**
 - It is an **intergovernmental organization** with a **membership of 192 Member States and Territories. India is a member.**
 - It originated from the **International Meteorological Organization (IMO)**, which was established after the 1873 Vienna International Meteorological Congress.
- **Establishment:**
 - Established by the ratification of the WMO Convention on 23rd March 1950, WMO became the **specialized agency of the United Nations** for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences.
- **Headquarters:**
 - Geneva, Switzerland.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to trans fatty acids (TFA), consider the following statements:

1. The natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products.
2. They have adverse effects on a human body.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations 2011.
- Trans fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats which can have much more **adverse effects on a human body** than any other dietary constituent. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/ or Natural TFAs.
- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.
- In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/ margarine while **the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products**, though in small amounts. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

2. Which of the following international treaties and conventions are signed by India to combat drug menace?

1. United Nations (UN) Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)
2. UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)
3. UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) 2000

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer : D

Explanation

- **International Treaties and Conventions to Combat Drug Menace:**
 - India is signatory of the following International treaties and conventions to combat the menace of Drug Abuse:
 - **United Nations (UN) Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**
 - **UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)**

- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)
- **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) 2000**
- **Hence, option D is correct.**

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

1. RailTel is a Maharatna Central Public Sector Enterprise.
2. It has been selected for implementation of Bharat Net project.

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

- Recently, RailTel has proposed to the Ministry of Education its plan for equipping rural schools, run by the central government, with the ability to hold 'smart classes'.
- RailTel is a "**Mini Ratna (Category-I)**" Central Public Sector Enterprise. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- It is an ICT (Information and Communication Technology) provider and one of the largest neutral telecom infrastructure providers in the country owning a Pan-India optic fiber network on exclusive Right of Way (ROW - for laying telecom cables) along Railway track.
- RailTel has been selected for implementation of various mission-mode projects for the Government of India including rolling out the National Knowledge Network, **Bharat Net** and USOF (Universal Service Obligation Fund) funded optical fiber based connectivity project in North East India. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

4. Consider the following statements regarding 'Indian Pangolin':

1. It is protected under the Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

2. The species is found at an elevation above 2500 m in the Eastern Himalayas.

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

- **Pangolins** are scaly anteater mammals and they have large, protective keratin scales covering their skin. They are the only known mammals with this feature.
 - Pangolins are nocturnal, and their diet consists of mainly ants and termites, which they capture using their long tongues.
- Out of the eight species of pangolin, the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) are found in India.
 - **Indian Pangolin** is widely distributed in India, except the arid region, high Himalayas and the North-East. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The species is also found in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
 - **Chinese Pangolin** is found in the Himalayan foothills in Eastern Nepal, Bhutan, Northern India, North-East Bangladesh and through Southern China.
- Conservation Status of Indian Pangolin:
 - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I**
 - IUCN Red List: Endangered
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

5. Which of the following zoo/s host/s pangolin conservation and breeding centre?

- 1. Nandankanan zoo
- 2. Arignar Anna Zoological Park
- 3. Kurumbapatti Zoological Park

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: a

Explanation

- The Nandankanan zoo hosts India's only pangolin conservation breeding centre.
- It is located in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

6. With reference to COVAXIN vaccines, consider the following statements:

1. It is an inactivated vaccine that destroys the ability of the pathogen to replicate.
2. It aims to develop an immune response to the nucleocapsid protein.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- Recently, the Drugs Controller General of India's (DCGI) approved COVISHIELD and COVAXIN vaccines for restricted use against Covid-19 in the country.
- COVAXIN is India's only indigenous Covid-19 vaccine.
- It is an inactivated vaccine which is developed by inactivating (killing) the live microorganisms that cause the disease.
- This **destroys the ability of the pathogen to replicate**, but keeps it intact so that the immune system can still recognise it and produce an immune response. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is expected to target more than just the spike protein.

- It also aims to develop an immune response to the nucleocapsid protein (the shell of the virus that encloses its genetic material). Hence, statement 2 is correct.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Publicly naming and shaming might be a flawed process but it is the only option available for any hope of justice for many victims of sexual harassment. Critically examine.

Approach

- Frame the recent context of public naming and shaming of sexual offenders on the social media platforms.
- Explain the concerns and challenges with public naming and shaming.
- Explain its significance in the backdrop of loopholes in other mechanisms available.
- Conclude by suggesting what other steps can be taken to address the issue.

2. In light of the recent farmers' protests, discuss the causes of agricultural distress in India and suggest measures to tackle these issues. (250 words)

Approach:-

- Highlight the issue.
- List the causes of Agrarian distress.
- Suggest measures to address the issue.