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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Chances of infection after COVID-19 vaccination

Context:

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has reported that around two to four of 10,000 people given two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have tested positive for the disease.
 - According to available data, of the 1.7 million people who got a second dose of Covaxin (and thus fully inoculated), 695 tested positive – a rate of 0.04%. Of the 15.7 million who got a second dose of Covishield, 5,014 tested positive, a rate of 0.03%.

Details:

Breakthrough infection:

- These are **infections that occur in people who have been vaccinated.**
- Such cases are not out of the ordinary as the **vaccines that have been approved so far the world over are made to protect against disease and not the transmission of the virus.**

Reasons for breakthrough infections:

- Healthcare and frontline workers were getting infected because of their **constant high exposure to COVID-19 patients.**
- The other reason could be the **highly transmissible new variants.**
 - Studies on the AstraZeneca vaccine show that its efficacy is reduced when faced with the U.K. and the South African variant.

Conclusion:

- Though breakthrough infection has occurred in “a very small number” of people, it does not undermine the effectiveness of vaccination. Vaccination does help protect against disease.
- While **vaccines protect against death and disease, they may not be 100% protective.**

2. ASEAN leaders urge junta to end killings

Context:

- **Emergency leaders summit** between the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping and the Myanmar coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, in the Indonesian capital city of Jakarta.

Background:

Violence in Myanmar:

- **Daily shootings by police** and soldiers since the February 1 coup have killed more than 700 mostly peaceful protesters and bystanders, according to several estimates.
- **Aung San Suu Kyi and many other political leaders have been detained.**
- Amnesty International has urged ASEAN states to investigate Min Aung Hlaing over “credible allegations of responsibility for crimes against humanity in Myanmar.”

Details:

- Expressing deep concerns over the violence in Myanmar, Southeast Asian leaders demanded an **immediate end to killings and the release of political detainees in Myanmar.**
- They also called for a dialogue between contending parties in Myanmar, with the aid of the bloc’s envoys. ASEAN has urged the **pursuance of dialogue, reconciliation and the return to normalcy** in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar.

Unusually blunt stance by ASEAN:

- The messages conveyed by the group was unusually blunt and could be seen as a breach of the **ASEAN’s bedrock principle of non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs.**
- The grouping is known to adopt a **non-confrontational approach** to any issue and employs **consensus based decision making.**

Reasons for the unusual stance:

- The ASEAN leaders have argued that the policy of non-interference should not lead to inaction given that the domestic **situation in Myanmar could jeopardize the peace, security, and stability of ASEAN and the region.**
- There is international **clamour for resolute action against Myanmar**

- There is a tremendous expectation on the part of the international community on how ASEAN is addressing the Myanmar issue.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. 384 rescued, 10 bodies recovered after avalanche in Uttarakhand

Context:

- Avalanche in Uttarakhand.

Background:

Avalanche:

- An avalanche is a **rapid flow of snow down a slope**, such as a hill or mountain.
- Primarily composed of flowing snow and air, large avalanches have the capability to capture and move ice, rocks, and trees.
- Avalanches can be set off spontaneously, by such factors as **increased precipitation or snowpack weakening**, or by external means such as humans, animals, and earthquakes.

Details:

- Notably, the Joshimath–Malari–Girithidobla–Sumna–Rimkhim axis area had experienced **heavy rain and snow** since the last five days, which is still continuing. This seems to have resulted in the avalanche.
- The avalanche hit a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) detachment and labour camps north of Joshimath.
- Ten bodies were recovered and 384 people rescued in the ongoing search and rescue operations. Eight persons are still unaccounted for.

4. Making oxygen

Context:

- **NASA has extracted oxygen from the carbon dioxide present in the thin Martian atmosphere.**

- The Martian atmosphere is about 95% carbon dioxide

Details:

- The unprecedented extraction of oxygen on Mars, marking the first extraction of a natural resource from the environment of another planet, was achieved by a device called **MOXIE aboard Perseverance rover of NASA.**
- **MOXIE is short for Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilization Experiment.**
- The device extracted carbon dioxide from the atmosphere on Mars and then **electrochemically split oxygen atoms from carbon dioxide molecules.** The conversion process requires high levels of heat to reach a **temperature of approximately 1,470 degrees Fahrenheit (800 Celsius).**
- The device was able to produce about 5 grams of oxygen, equivalent to roughly 10 minutes' worth of breathing for an astronaut.

Significance:

- This breakthrough could allow for **longer human stays on future manned missions to mars.**
- It would also enable the space agencies to design **lighter launch vehicles with lower payload capacities** given that future missions could prepare the required oxygen for the return journey in situ on mars.

5. Groundwater depletion may reduce winter cropping intensity by 20% in India

Context:

- New study into the problems being faced by **wheat farmers in India** with respect to productivity and sustainability.

Background:

Rabi season in India:

- The **Indian cropping season** is classified into two main seasons-**Kharif and Rabi.**
- Rabi crops are also known as winter crops. **The Rabi crops are sown in late October or early November and harvested in spring.**

Important crops:

- Some of the important winter crops are **wheat, barley, mustard, peas and gram** with wheat being the most important crop of Rabi season.

- **India is the second-largest producer of wheat in the world**, with over 30 million hectares in the country dedicated to producing wheat in India.

Irrigation:

- **Rabi crops require frequent irrigation** because these are grown in dry areas.
- India's three main irrigation types on winter cropped areas include **dug wells, tube wells and canals**.

Concerns:

Sustainability issues with respect to cropping pattern:

- In the green revolution era, policy-supported environment led to a **large increase in rice cultivation in north western India mainly in Punjab and Haryana** which are **ecologically less suitable for rice cultivation** due to predominantly light soils.
- This policy-supported intensive agriculture led to **unsustainable groundwater use** for irrigation and in turn groundwater scarcity.
- There was also **post-harvest residue burning** to make way for the timely sowing of wheat. This has resulted in high levels of air pollution in NCT and adjoining areas which has cropped up as a major health challenge to India.

Water scarcity and impact on agricultural sector:

- The study found that 13% of the villages in which farmers plant a winter crop are located in **critically water-depleted regions**.
- The study notes that these villages may lose 68% of their cropped area in future if access to all groundwater irrigation is lost. The results suggest that these losses will largely occur in **northwest and central India**.
- The study notes that with severe groundwater depletion, **the cropping intensity or the amount of land planted in the winter season may decrease by up to 20% by 2025**.
 - Groundwater depletion has already **reduced yields** and cropped areas in India over the last 20 years.

Unviability of alternative sources:

- The study into using canals as an alternative irrigation source and as an adaptation strategy to falling groundwater tables noted that **switching to canal irrigation has limited adaptation potential at the national scale**.

Possible impact of climate change:

- Climate change is likely to further adversely affect the future availability of groundwater resources given the **dependence of India on Monsoons** for its water resources.

Way forward:

Adaptation strategy:

- The farmers will have to adopt new or additional adaptation strategies like the following:
 - Adoption of **water-saving technologies** like sprinkler, drip irrigation
 - Switching to **less water-intensive crops** to ensure more effective use of the limited groundwater resources. Example- Shifting from crops like Rice and Wheat to crops like millets
 - Growing crops suited to the local resource base and environment.

Promoting agriculture in eastern India:

- There are enough groundwater resources supported with higher monsoon rainfall in eastern Indian states like Bihar. But due to lack of enough irrigation infrastructure, farmers are not able to make use of natural resources there.
- **Better policies in eastern India to expand the irrigation** will not only help provide an impetus to agricultural activity and agriculture productivity in this region but will also release some pressure from north-western Indian states.

6. A space for science, experiments and unity

Context:

- Russian space agency Roscosmos's chief has declared that **Russia is ready to build its own space station and launch it by 2030.**
- Further, Russian Deputy Prime minister has also said that **Russia would leave the International Space Station (ISS) by 2025.**

International Space Station (ISS):

International collaboration:

- The International Space Station (ISS) is a landmark of international cooperation in the realm of space

- For over 20 years, it has seen intense collaboration between the **NASA (U.S.), Roscosmos (Russia), ESA (Europe), JAXA (Japan) and CSA (Canada)**, and has played host to people from 19 countries since its launch in 1998.
- Ever since November 2, 2000, the ISS has seen the steady presence of human beings.

Features:

- The ISS, at a **height of about 402 km above the Earth, orbits it 16 times every day, once every 90 minutes**. It has a speed of 28,000 km per hour.

Scientific studies:

- The space station will permit quantum leaps in human **research in science, communications, and in metals and lifesaving medicines** which could be manufactured only in space.
- The following studies have been undertaken so far.

Biological:

- The first experiments on the ISS studied the **dynamics of cells under microgravity**.
- Some of the experiments being conducted by the latest expeditions include a **study of how muscles work under long-term stay under low-gravity conditions**. This experiment observes biochemical properties of muscles under long-term exposure to spaceflight. This can help in developing rehabilitation both on Earth and in Space.

Material:

- An important experiment mimics the way geckos attach themselves to surfaces, using an **adhesive** that has been shown to work in space. This can help devise methods for robots to attach themselves to surfaces and then to detach just the way geckos do.

Physics experiments:

- Some of the early physical sciences experiments related to **crystal growth**.
- Current studies involve research into **Janus particles, or particles that have two 'faces' with distinct properties** – one side is hydrophobic, while the other is hydrophilic. Studying these in microgravity reveals the **fundamental physics behind microparticle self-assembly** and the kinds of colloidal structures that can be fabricated.

7. RBI to issue cybersecurity norms for payment services

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will soon issue **cybersecurity norms for payment service providers (PSPs)**.

Background:

Increasing traction of digital payment system:

- As digitisation increases in any sphere, payments or otherwise, people would be involved in more and more digital transactions.
- Digital transactions are bound to gain further traction over the coming years.

Cyber security concerns:

- There have been a **series of data breaches** faced by operators including **Mobikwik** and **payment aggregator JusPay**.

Governmental efforts:

- Given the increasing risk posed by cyber frauds, **Reserve Bank of India has issued very recently basic guidelines on cyber hygiene and cybersecurity for banks and certain NBFCs**.

Details:

- The RBI would soon also be issuing cybersecurity norms for payment service providers (PSPs).
- While the standards for fintech-driven payment services providers will be similar to cyber hygiene norms issued recently for banks and non-banking finance companies, the RBI is quite clear that firms will have to do more than observe the minimum standards to ensure safety with respect to digital transactions.

Other concern in payment services segment:

Concentration of segment share:

- Experts have also raised concerns about the **domination of two or three players in the fintech-backed retail payments space**.
 - Two apps provide about 70% of third-party services in the UPI system.

- The concentration of two or three third-party providers in this retail payments space could **give rise to competitive weaknesses**.

Counterview:

- Given the fact that the two or big tech companies in the segment are not payment system providers as such, but act as just the front-end of the system and just on board customers and **have no control on the entire UPI itself**, in that sense, there is **not so much a concern on antitrust or monopolistic tendencies**.
- Given the rising popularity of UPI, the government will have to think twice about stepping in and **controlling the market share** of two or three popular apps because that **could actually hurt absorption of this tech in the population**.

Conclusion:

- Over the next decade, the critical challenge for regulators would be to **speed up the absorption of fintech without undermining the financial system's integrity or stability** by addressing the issue of cyber security and monopolistic tendencies.

8. Reforms in the National Pension System

Context:

- Changes proposed by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) to the **National Pension System (NPS)**.

Background:

National Pension System:

- The National Pension System (NPS) is a **pension and investment scheme** developed by the Government of India to provide citizens of India with long-term financial security. It offers a long-term saving option for appropriately planning one's retirement through **market-linked returns**.
- The National Pension System (NPS) started out as the **New Pension Scheme for government employees in 2004** under a new regulator called the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**. It has since been opened for individuals from all walks of life to participate.

- The NPS has been growing in size and now manages ₹5.78 lakh crore of savings and 4.24 crore accounts in multiple savings schemes.
 - It includes over 3.02 crore accounts as **part of the Atal Pension Yojana (APY)**, a government-backed scheme for workers in the **unorganised sector** that assures a fixed pension payout after retirement.
 - The rest of the corpus constitutes voluntary savings from private sector employees and self-employed individuals.

Changes being proposed to the NPS:

Entry and exit age limit to be modified:

- Individuals between the age group of 18 and 65 can currently enter the NPS. The regulator is planning to hike the limit to 70 years. The proposed exit age of 70 years may be increased to 75 years.
- With the **longevity increasing**, it makes sense to hike the maximum entry and exit age to 70 years and 75 years, respectively.

PFRDA planning to issue minimum assured return:

- While different schemes under the NPS have given reasonable returns at a **low fund-management cost** so far, there has been a clamour for a **guaranteed return product** for large sections of potential investors with a high aversion to risk.
- To lure more subscribers, the PFRDA is working on strategies to launch new retirement benefit options, such as one that has a minimum assured return.
- The moment pension fund managers start giving guarantee on products, it could help **popularize pension schemes**.

Exit option to be hiked:

- **NPS contributors can withdraw 60% of their contribution after retirement, while the remaining 40% must be maintained to purchase annuity.**
- Those who accumulate only up to Rs 2 lakh by the time they reach retirement age, on the other hand, are entitled to withdraw the entire amount.
- The PFRDA is planning to hike the limit to Rs 5 lakh.
- The reason for this change is that if a subscriber has a corpus of Rs 2 lakh or less at the time of retirement, the amount provided as a monthly pension is very low.

Payout options to be flexible:

- Currently subscribers must deposit 40% of their NPS deposits with one of the 12 insurance companies that the NPS has partnered with. The regulator is planning to introduce more flexibility in this regard.
 - **Annuity rates have dropped to ranges between 5% and 6%.** Since annuities are taxable, when one factor in **taxes and inflation**, the investors will end up with a **poor return, in some cases even yielding negative returns to the investors.**
- The regulator has now proposed to give members a choice to retain 40% of their corpus with the NPS fund managers even after retirement. This, the PFRDA chief believes, will allow them to get better returns, and these savings can be paid out to members over 15 years through something like the systematic withdrawal plan offered by mutual funds.
- Separately, the regulator has decided that the annuity purchase stipulation for 40% of members' retirement corpus should be dropped altogether.

Conclusion:

- The changes proposed by the pension regulator would to **make the National Pension Scheme more appealing and help broaden its scope across India.**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Special Task Force to Monitor J&K Government Employees

In news

- The J&K government constituted a Special Task Force (STF) for identifying and scrutinising the government employees who are involved in any cases related to posing threat to the security or anti-national activities.

Key takeaways

- The STF will have the ADGP, (CID), J&K, as its chairman and the IGP, representatives of the Home Department; Department of Law, Justice Member and Parliamentary Affairs and the concerned department as its members.

- The STF will scrutinise cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under Article 311(2)(C) of the Constitution.
- The STF has been tasked to compile records of such employees and engage with other members of the Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) for identifying such other employees.
- The move comes as a number of government employees in the past were found expressing their political opinion in public space on the Kashmir conflict.

Important value additions

Article 311(2) in The Constitution Of India, 1949

- No such person as aforesaid shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.
- Provided further that this clause shall not apply:
 1. where a person is dismissed or removed or reduced in rank on the ground of conduct which has led to his conviction on a criminal charge; or
 2. where the authority empowered to dismiss or remove a person or to reduce him in rank is satisfied that for some reason, to be recorded by that authority in writing, it is not reasonably practicable to hold such inquiry; or
 3. where the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of the State, it is not expedient to hold such inquiry

2. Urban Housing

Issues

- **Growth of Slums:** The long-existing problem of shortage of affordable formal housing in India has pushed 40% of people to move to overcrowded informal and unauthorised colonies and slums.
- **Harassment by authorities:** Slum-dwellers live in congested and insecure localities, in constant danger of eviction and displacement.
- **Substandard Quality of Life:** Over 65 million people live in urban slums or informal settlements with poor living conditions, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, overcrowding and insecure residential status.

Why addressing Housing Issue is important?

- **Socio-Economic Development:** Security of land tenure and stable access to housing have the potential to unlock massive economic and social value for India's poorest.
- **Multiplier Effect:** Addressing 'housing poverty' in India can be a simultaneous weapon against many other developmental issues – better physical safety and public health, sanitation, livelihoods, dignified living and human development.

Way Ahead

- **Sustainable approach:** Government need to make the process of urbanisation more equitable and sustainable.
- **Empowering Migrants:** Maximising transparency in the rural-to-urban migration decisions and thus, empowering the otherwise vulnerable migrant workers.
- **Civil Society Contribution:** Entrepreneurs, nonprofits, philanthropists and policy-makers need to collectively develop meaningful interventions for the economically and socially disadvantaged.
- **Leveraging innovation & digital technologies for inclusivity:** Innovations in housing fabrication like use of Recycled material makes urbanization more sustainable, Open data solutions connecting the government, and a more focused economic push for property rights of women and facilitation rights of vulnerable populations/ tribals
- **Institutional Welfare measures:** Insurance facility, Legal aid, awareness, and dispute resolution; Innovations for affordable housing; Access to welfare schemes and financial services.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

3. 5th session of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH)

In news

- The Fifth session of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH), began virtually.
- **Host:** India
- **Secretariat of Committee:** Spices Board India
- CCSCH is established under Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

Important value additions

Codex Committee On Spices And Culinary Herbs (CCSCH)

- **Objective:** To develop and expand worldwide standards for spices and culinary herbs
- **Formed in:** 2013
- It was formed with support of more than a hundred countries
- **Host:** India
- **Secretariat of Committee:** Spices Board India
- Since its inception, the CCSCH has been successful in developing harmonised global Codex standards for spices and herbs.
- In its past four sessions, the committee developed and finalized standards for four spices, viz. dried or dehydrated forms of black/white/green pepper, cumin, thyme, and garlic.

Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

- **Set up in:** 1963.
- It is an intergovernmental body
- **Established jointly by:** UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), within the framework of the Joint Food Standards Programme
- **Objective:** To protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade.

4. Russia's space agency hopes to launch its own orbital station

In news

- Russia's space agency (Roscosmos) hopes to launch its own orbital station in 2025 as it considers withdrawing from the International Space Station programme to go it alone.

Key takeaways

- Work had begun on the first module of a new station.
- The announcement came with tensions soaring with the West.
- Russia lost its monopoly for manned flights to the ISS last year after the first successful mission of U.S. company Space X.

Do you know?

- ISS was launched in 1998 and involves Russia, USA, Canada, Japan, and the European Space Agency
- It is one of the most ambitious international collaborations in human history.

5. India's gas output to jump 52% by 2024 led by ONGC

India's natural gas production is projected to jump by 52 per cent to 122 million standard cubic metres per day by 2024.

Key highlights:

- Natural gas **production in 2019-20 was 85 mmscmd**, which is estimated to have fallen to 80 mmscmd in the following year.
- The output is projected to rise in the current fiscal that started on April 1 to 93 mmscmd, 107 mmscmd in the following year **and 122 mmscmd in 2023- 24.**
- The increase in production augments with government plans for raising the share of natural gas to **15 per cent by 2030 from the** current 6.2 per cent in a bid to cut emissions.
- ONGC is likely to see production rise to **67 mmscmd in 2021-22 from 62 mmscmd** in 2020.
- Reliance-BP combine, which in December 2020 brought newer fields in their eastern offshore KG-D6 block to production, would lead to the **rise in gas output by non-PSUs.**
- This increasing gas supply from domestic sources should drive earnings growth and valuations for **the Indian gas utilities**, especially the gas transmission companies.
- Tenders to sell gas from the KG Basin **indicate that ramp-up in domestic gas production** is faster than investor expectation.

Natural Gas:

- Natural gas is a naturally occurring **hydrocarbon gas mixture consisting** primarily of methane, is a fossil fuel.
 - Commonly including varying amounts of other higher alkanes, and sometimes a small percentage of **carbon dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen sulfide, or helium.**
- It is formed when layers of decomposing plant and animal matter are exposed to intense heat and pressure under the surface of the **Earth over millions of** years.
- The energy that the plants originally obtained from the sun is stored in the form of chemical bonds in the gas.

- The extraction and consumption of **natural gas is a major** and growing driver of climate change.
- It is a potent greenhouse gas itself **when released** into the atmosphere, and creates carbon dioxide when burnt.
- However, gas venting and flaring, along with **unintended fugitive emissions** throughout the supply chain, can result in a similar carbon footprint overall.

Uses:

- Natural gas can be efficiently burned to generate heat and electricity, emitting less waste and toxins at the point of **use relative to other fossil and biomass fuels**.
- **Natural gas is a non-renewable hydrocarbon** used as a source of energy for heating, cooking, and electricity generation.
- It is also used as a **fuel for vehicles** and as a chemical feedstock in the manufacture of plastics and other commercially **important organic** chemicals.

6. Global Energy Review 2021 report

Initial estimates for 2020 energy demand and CO₂ emission was released recently in an annual report **Global Energy Review** by International Energy Agency (IEA).

- The Global Energy Review is annual update on the latest trends in world energy and CO₂ emissions.
- It covers all the **main fuels and technologies**, providing insights across regions, economies and countries.

Highlights of the report:

- Global energy-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are on course to **surge by 1.5 billion tonnes** in 2021 driven by in the resurgence of coal use in the power sector.
 - The second-largest increase in history.
 - This would be the **biggest annual rise** in emissions since 2010, during the carbon-intensive recovery from the global financial crisis.
- CO₂ emissions will **increase by almost five per cent** in 2021 to 33 billion tonnes.
 - **The key driver is coal demand**, which is set to grow by 4.5 per cent, surpassing its 2019 level and approaching its all-time peak from 2014, with the electricity sector accounting for **three-quarters of this increase**.

- Global energy demand is set to increase by 4.6 per cent in 2021, led by emerging markets and developing economies, pushing it above its 2019 level.
- Demand for **all fossil fuels is on course to grow significantly in 2021**, with both coal and gas set to rise above their 2019 levels.
- **Oil is also rebounding strongly** but is expected to stay below its 2019 peak, as the aviation sector remains under pressure.
 - More than **80 per cent of the projected** growth in coal demand in 2021 is set to come from Asia, led by China.
- **Electricity generation** from renewables is set to **leap by over eight per cent in 2021**.
- The biggest contribution to that growth comes from **solar and wind**.
 - Electricity generation from **wind is projected to grow by 275 terawatt-hours**, or around 17 per cent, from last year.
 - Electricity generation from **solar PV is expected to increase by 145 terawatt-hours**, up almost 18 per cent from last year.
 - Their combined output is on track to reach more than **2800 terawatt-hours in 2021**.
- Renewables are set to provide **30 per cent of electricity generation** worldwide in 2021.
- **China** is expected to account for almost **half of the global increase in electricity generation** from renewables, followed by the US, the European Union and India.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Reaching Zero Forum, sometimes seen in the news recently, is associated with elimination of?

- a. AIDS
- b. Malaria
- c. COVID-19
- d. Tuberculosis

Answer : b

- Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare has recently chaired the “Reaching Zero” forum on malaria elimination to celebrate World Malaria Day.
- Every year, 25th April is observed as ‘World Malaria Day’.
- This year’s theme for the day is “Reaching the Zero Malaria target.”

2. Uttarakhand is vulnerable to which of the following disasters?

1. Earthquakes
2. Landslides
3. Cloud bursts
4. Glacial bursts
5. Forest fires

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 2, 3 and 4 only
- c. 1, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Uttarakhand is geologically unstable and ecologically sensitive.

- Due to anthropological factors, the frequency and intensity of natural hazards have increased in the fragile state over the last few decades.
- Due to its topography and geology, the state faces the risk of calamitous events like flash floods/floods, cloudbursts, earthquakes, landslides, mudflows, and forest fires among others.

3. Global Energy Transition Index is released by which of the following International organization?

- a. International Solar Alliance (ISA)
- b. International Energy Agency (IEA)
- c. World Economic Forum (WEF)
- d. International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

Answer : c

Global Energy Transition Index

- Recently, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has released the annual rankings of the.
- The index benchmarks 115 economies on the current performance of their energy systems across economic development and growth, environmental sustainability and energy security and access indicators and their readiness for transition to secure, sustainable, affordable and inclusive energy systems.
- Sweden has topped the Index for the third consecutive year and is followed by Switzerland and Finland in the top three.
- Argentina, China, India and Italy are among the major countries with consistent annual improvements.
- India has moved up two positions to rank 74th with improvements in all three dimensions of the energy triangle namely:
 1. Economic development and growth.
 2. Energy access and security.
 3. Environmental sustainability.

World Economic Forum

- It is a Swiss non-profit foundation established in 1971, based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Major reports published by WEF:

1. Global Competitiveness Report
2. Global IT Report
3. Global Gender Gap Report
4. Global Risk Report
5. Global Travel and Tourism Report

4. India draws its human rights obligations from:

1. Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993
2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN
3. Rights guaranteed by the Constitution

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- There is an apparent impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on drafting Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Indian Constitution.
- Every citizen is guaranteed basic human rights under the Indian Constitution.
- India has acceded to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN.
- As per the provisions of the Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 1993 as an independent statutory body as a watchdog of human rights in the country.

5. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. ASEAN grouping is open for membership to all countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. No ASEAN country shares a land border with India.
3. India is one of the founding members of ASEAN.

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 3 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- ASEAN was founded in 1967 with five members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. India is not a founding member.
- It is headquartered in Jakarta.
- Myanmar which is a member of ASEAN shares its land border with India.
- ASEAN grouping is not open for membership to all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is an organisation of South-East Asian Nations only.

6. Which country is known for having 'self-defence forces' in the place of regular armed forces?

- a. Switzerland
- b. Norway
- c. Japan
- d. Finland

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Japan Self-Defence Forces also referred to as the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), is the unified military forces of Japan that were established in 1954, and are controlled by the Ministry of Defence.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Indian constitution is federal in nature, but unitary in soul. Examine (150 words)

Approach

- Write the meaning of federal and unitary system of government in the introduction
- Describe the federal and unitary characteristics of Indian constitution.
- Examine how the centre government is more powerful than states.

2Q. Discuss the advantages of river linking projects and its possible impact on the environment. (150 words)

Approach

- Introduce by explaining about the river interlinking project.
- Discuss advantages of the project.
- Enumerate possible impacts of the project on the environment.