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Articles of the day THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS



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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Bursting the exam bubble

The article discusses the need for genuine attempts to develop multiple evaluation designs for different levels of education.

Details:

- While there are valid concerns about the future, which include admissions to higher educational institutions, the possibility of **holding exams in person poses a further threat to the lives of people.**
- The National Curriculum Framework of 2005 affirms the importance of embracing the emotional, social, physical and intellectual growth of children within a framework of human values.
 - Therefore, a question to consider is whether academic performances can continue to be the sole representation of student growth.
 - Alternatively, student success can be redefined based on social, emotional and spiritual development benchmarks.
- Raising the quality of educational assessments and evaluations by involving higher educational institutions may even prevent a mass exodus to international universities so that young leaders can be nurtured to engage with underlying national challenges and add value by sustaining the fabric of a diverse and non-stratified India.

Way Forward:

- Virtual educational committees must be organised to rethink approaches to assessing student learning.
- Question papers must be designed in a way that encourages students to critically engage with the material, contest perspectives and build opinions.
- In light of the **right to education** that affirms the **importance of formative assessments**, teachers could be invited to engage in evaluating student's performance across the year.
- If there are concerns around the tendency of schools to self-bolster their performance, reports, portfolios, samples of responses and grades could be shared across a pool of schools so that teachers can anonymously assess and provide insightful feedback on student performance, until a sense of self-accountability and trust can be cultivated.

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- Opening up possibilities of evaluating students on their performance through the year will contribute towards making evaluation and learning much more holistic.
- Further, inviting higher educational institutions to facilitate **online entrance exams** could be another option. Eventually, the goal could be to involve students in self and peer evaluations.

Conclusion:

The pandemic presents an opportunity to **redefine meaningful education** even though it **requires a concerted change across the curriculum in K-12 schools**, the **entrance criteria** determined by higher educational institutions. Viewing this crisis as a signal for urgent change, core issues can be engaged with and re-evaluated to **prevent students from being trapped in the current system of cramming, rote learning and anxiety**. The government needs to give complete autonomy to educational committees composed of students, teachers, educational leaders, scholars and researchers who can advocate, organise and implement this change nationally and internationally. Re-imagining educational assessments and evaluations, exploring alternatives is the need of the hour.

2. Education Re-imaging learning

Context:

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has **drastically disrupted the overall education system** across the globe. Consequently, there was a **disproportionate impact on** the education of **students with disabilities**.

The article discusses **how Indian higher education can be made more inclusive** for students with disabilities.

Issues:

- During the initial phase of the lockdown, there was a lack of guidelines and an absence of tools to facilitate students with visual, hearing or specific learning disabilities.
- The pandemic exposed the stark lack of academic infrastructure for students with disabilities in Indian universities.
- It highlighted the **lack of access to technology and assistive devices** that could have eased the non-inclusive nature of typical teaching content.

Need for planning:

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- While there has been progress in making education accessible to all, the National Education Policy 2020 included proposals on barrier-free access to education and teacher training.
- The magnitude and complexities involved in implementation need exhaustive planning and meticulous execution.

Way Forward:

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must contribute towards creating an inclusive society.
- Government authorities must adopt some long-term measures that will help establish a **process that addresses the needs of all learners**.
 - **Inter-ministerial coordination** would be required for all-encompassing standardised guidelines for digital education infrastructure.
- One of the key tenets of inclusive education is to make provisions that can give the students with specific needs full access to adequate services.
 - To ensure this, there is a need for a coordinated approach that makes universal accessibility norms an integral part of pedagogy and teaching methodology in universities.
- On the ground, a **learning support system** needs to be established in each university both public and private.
- Awareness and sensitisation towards people with disabilities is paramount.
- While there are visible disabilities that need an accessible physical and academic infrastructure in HEIs, the invisible ones such as Autism Spectrum, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) need to be understood and seen as learning and thinking differences.

3. North Korea says Biden has a 'hostile policy', warns of response

Context:

Joe Biden, in his first address to Congress, called **North Korea and Iran's nuclear programs a serious threat to America's security and world security. North Korea has accused U.S. President** Joe Biden of pursuing a **hostile policy** and has warned of a response.

Background:

Talks aimed at **persuading North Korea to surrender its nuclear weapons program** have been stalled since a series of summits between Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un failed to result in a deal.

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Details:

- Under the policy review, **Biden has settled on a new approach to pressuring North Korea that will explore using diplomacy to break the stalemate** but not seek a grand bargain with Mr. Kim.
 - Biden had said that his administration would **deal with the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear programme through diplomacy as well as stern deterrence.**
- The White House said that its **goal** remains the **complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula**.
- It also said that **Biden was open to negotiations with North Korea on denuclearisation** following the completion of a policy review.

4. Image can't be better than reality

Context:

World Press Freedom Day is observed on the 3rd of May every year.

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) affirms that this day acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom.
- It is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics.

Importance of free press:

- A set of **interrelated components of press freedom** such as its intrinsic value, its informational role, its protective role and its constructive contributions, **become a bedrock for equitable development.**
- Amartya Sen has pointed out the reasons why **media is important for economic development**.

Impact of COVID-19 on Journalists:

- Journalists are paying an unusually high price for doing their job, often reporting from the field, standing outside hospitals, morgues and cremation grounds.
- More than a hundred journalists have lost their lives in India over the past year.
- Both the Centre and the States must **extend all the facilities provided to frontline workers to these professionals.**

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Note:

- The Odisha government has declared working journalists as frontline Covid warriors, recognising the risks they undertake to cover the pandemic.
- Journalists have been covered under Gopabandhu Sambadika Swasthya Bima Yojana. They get health insurance cover of ₹2 lakh each.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. State Disaster Response Fund

Why in News

Recently, the Centre has released the **first instalment of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) to States,** in the wake of the **second wave of Covid-19** that has claimed thousands of lives since April 2021.

• Normally, the first instalment is released in June as per the recommendations of the **Finance Commission**.

Key Points

- About:
 - SDRF has been constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
 - It was constituted based on the recommendations of the 13th Finance Commission.
 - It is the **primary fund available with the State governments** for responses to notified disasters to meet expenditure for providing immediate relief.
 - It is audited by the **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)** every year.
- Contribution:
 - The Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation for general category States and Union Territories and 90% for special category States and Union Territories (northeastern States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

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- The annual Central contribution is **released in two equal installments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.**
- Disaster (s) Covered under SDRF:
 - **Cyclone**, drought, **earthquake**, fire, **flood**, **tsunami**, hailstorm, **landslide**, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and **cold waves**.
- Local Disasters:
- A **State Government may use up to 10% of the funds** available under the SDRF for providing immediate relief to the victims of natural disasters that they consider to be 'disasters' within the local context in the State and which are not included in the notified list of disasters of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

6. RBI to strengthen risk-based supervision (RBS) of banks, NBFCs

About RBS model

• The RBI uses the **Risk-Based Supervision (RBS)** model, including both **qualitative and quantitative elements**, to supervise banks, urban cooperatives banks, non-banking financial companies and all India financial institutions.

Decision to review the model

- The Reserve Bank has decided **to review and strengthen** the Risk-Based Supervision (RBS) of the banking sector with a view to enable financial sector players **to address the emerging challenges**.
- The review process will help make the extant **RBS model more robust and capable of addressing emerging challenges**, while removing inconsistencies if any.
- Annual financial inspection of UCBs and NBFCs is largely based on **CAMELS model** (Capital Adequacy, Asset Quality, Management, Earnings, Liquidity, and Systems & Control).
- It is intended to review the existing supervisory rating models under CAMELS approach for improved risk capture in a forward-looking manner and for harmonising the supervisory approach across all Supervised Entities.

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. G7 to consider mechanism to counter misinformation

G7 considering rapid response mechanism

- The G7 members are Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan and their combined gross domestic product is about \$40 trillion – a little less than half of the global economy.
- **G7** will look at a proposal to build a rapid response mechanism to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation.
- Speaking ahead of a G7 foreign ministers' meeting in London British Foreign Secretary said the United Kingdom was getting the G7 to come together with a rapid rebuttal mechanism to counter Russian misinformation.
- Britain has identified Russia as the **biggest threat to its security** though it views China as its **greatest long-term challenge**, **militarily**, **economically and technologically**.

Britain to engage more in Indo-Pacific

- Britain has invited **India**, Australia and South Korea to attend this week's meeting and the **full leaders' summit in June**.
- There was no concrete proposal as yet about Britain joining Quad.
- Britain has been looking at ways to engage more in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Asian Development Outlook 2021: ADB

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Why in News

According to the report Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, the second wave of Covid-19 can put India's economic recovery at "risk".

• ADO is a series of annual economic reports on the Developing Member Countries (DMCs) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Key Points

- GDP Projections:
 - For India:
 - Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will rebound strongly by 11% in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 due to continued economic recovery boosted by increased public investment, vaccine rollout, and a surge in domestic demand.
 - India's economic growth to moderate to 7% in FY 2022-23.
 - The economy is expected to have contracted by 8% in FY 2020-21 in line with the government's second advance estimate.
 - For Developing Asia:
 - The economic growth is set to rebound to 7.3% in 2021-22. This follows a 0.2% contraction last year.
 - **Developing Asia** comprises **46 members of ADB list** on the basis of geographic group.
 - These include new industrialized economies, countries in Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.
 - India is also part of Developing Asia.
- Challenges:
 - **Pandemic** remains the **biggest risk** for the region (Developing Asia) as potential delays in vaccine rollouts or significant new outbreaks could undermine growth.
 - Increasing geopolitical tensions, production bottlenecks, financial turmoil from tightening financial conditions, and long-term scarring like learning losses due to school closures are among other risk factors.
- Costs of Pandemic-induced School Closures:
 - Countries are using distance learning, but this is only partially effective as many students lack access to computers and the internet.
 - These disruptions **will affect the skills** students acquire and, eventually, **their productivity** and **earnings as future workers**.

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- **Learning losses** range from **8% of a year of learning in the Pacific,** where schools have mostly stayed open, to **55% in South Asia**, where school closures have been longest.
- The **present value of students' future earning reductions** is estimated at USD 1.25 trillion for developing Asia, equivalent to 5.4% of the region's GDP in 2020.

• Analysis for India:

- Increased government expenditure on health care, water, and sanitation will strengthen the country's resilience against future pandemics.
- **Private investment** is expected to pick up on improving sentiment and risk appetite, as well as **accommodative credit conditions** (i.e. making money less expensive to borrow and encouraging more spending).
- **Domestic demand** is expected to remain the **main driver of growth**.
 - A faster vaccine rollout will boost urban demand for services, while the rural demand will be boosted by robust agriculture growth and continued government support to farmers by expanding irrigation, improving value chains, and increasing farm loan limits.
- The government's push to the **manufacturing sector** through the **production-linked incentive scheme** will expand domestic production and help integrate domestic manufacturing with global supply chains.

Gross Domestic Product

- **GDP** is a measure of economic activity in a country. It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and services. It gives the economic output from the consumers' side.
- GDP = Private consumption + Gross investment + Government investment + Government spending + (exports-imports)

Asian Development Bank

- **ADB** is a regional development bank established in 1966.
- It has **68 members. India is a founding member.**
 - 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- It **aims** to promote social and economic development in Asia and the Pacific.
- As of 31st December 2019, ADB's five largest shareholders are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares), the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).
- It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines.

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GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. Glaciers are melting more rapidly

Glaciers shrinking faster than before

- A new study by ETH Zurich and University of Toulouse researchers finds that the world's glaciers are shrinking at a faster rate than before.
- If the trend continues this will put the densely-populated parts of Asia at risk of flood and water shortages.
- The study found the world's ice fields lost 298 gigatons of ice per year from 2015 to 2019, a 30% increase in the rate of retreat compared with the previous five years.
- Glaciers in Alaska, the Alps and Iceland are among those disappearing at the fastest pace.
- The scientists used images from a special camera aboard NASA's Terra satellite, which has circled the Earth every 100 minutes since its launch in 1999.

Impact

- The situation in the Himalayas is particularly worrying.
- Swathes of **India and Bangladesh** could face water stress during dry periods when major rivers like the Ganges and Indus are mainly fed by glacial runoff.
- Glaciers typically accumulate ice in the winter, but a warming climate means summer melting has outstripped those gains and caused a net loss of ice in mountain regions.
- The melting in turn contributes to global warming and indirectly accelerates sea level rise, raising the risk of flooding faced by coastal communities.

4. Core Sector Output

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Why in News

The eight core sectors grew by 6.8% in March 2021 (the highest in 32 months), after a 3.8% dip in February, but the spike was largely due to the base effects from March 2020.

• During **2020-21** (April-March), output of the **eight sectors contracted by 7**% as against a positive growth of 0.4% in 2019-20.

Key Points

- About Eight Core Sectors:
 - These comprise **40.27% of the weight** of items included in the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP).**
 - The eight core sector industries in decreasing order of their weightage: Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.
- Base Effect:
 - The base effect **refers to the effect that the choice of a basis of comparison or reference can have on the result** of the comparison between data points.
 - For example, the base effect can lead to an apparent under- or overstatement of figures such as inflation rates or economic growth rates if the point chosen for comparison has an unusually high or low value relative to the current period or the overall data.
 - Production of natural gas, steel, cement and electricity jumped 12.3%, 23%, 32.5% and 21.6% in March 2021, as against (-) 15.1%, (-) 21.9%, (-) 25.1% and (-) 8.2% in March 2020, respectively (low base effect).
- Index of Industrial Production:
 - **IIP** is an indicator that **measures the changes in the volume of production of industrial products** during a given period.
 - It is compiled and published monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
 - It is a **composite indicator** that measures the growth rate of industry groups classified under:
 - Broad sectors, namely, Mining, Manufacturing, and Electricity.
 - **Use-based sectors,** namely Basic Goods, Capital Goods, and Intermediate Goods.
 - **Base Year** for IIP is **2011-2012**.
 - Significance of IIP:
 - It is used by government agencies including the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India, etc, **for policy-making purposes.**

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• IIP remains extremely relevant for the calculation of the quarterly and advance GDP (Gross Domestic Product) estimates.

5. Climate change causing a shift in Earth's axis

Context: Rising sea levels, heatwaves, melting glaciers and storms are some of the well-known consequences of climate change. New research has added yet another impact to this list – marked shifts in the axis along which the Earth rotates.

A study published in Geophysical Research Letters of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) says that due to the significant melting of glaciers because of global temperature rise, our planet's axis of rotation has been moving more than usual since the 1990s.

How the Earth's axis shifts?

- The Earth's axis of rotation is the line along which it spins around itself as it revolves around the Sun. The points on which the axis intersects the planet's surface are the geographical north and south poles.
- The location of the poles is not fixed, however, as the axis moves due to changes in how the Earth's mass is distributed around the planet. Thus, the poles move when the axis moves, and the movement is called "polar motion".
- According to NASA, data from the 20th century shows that the spin axis drifted about 10 centimetres per year. Meaning over a century, polar motion exceeds 10 metres.
- Generally, polar motion is caused by changes in the hydrosphere, atmosphere, oceans, or solid Earth. But now, climate change is adding to the degree with which the poles wander.

What the new study says?

- Since the 1990s, climate change has caused billions of tonnes of glacial ice to melt into oceans. This has caused the Earth's poles to move in new directions.
- As per the study, the north pole has shifted in a new eastward direction since the 1990s, because of changes in the hydrosphere (meaning the way in which water is stored on Earth).
- From 1995 to 2020, the average speed of drift was 17 times faster than from 1981 to 1995. Also, in the last four decades, the poles moved by about 4 metres in distance.

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- The faster ice melting under global warming was the most likely cause of the directional change of the polar drift in the 1990s, the study says.
- The other possible causes are (terrestrial water storage) change in non-glacial regions due to climate change and unsustainable consumption of groundwater for irrigation and other anthropogenic activities
- While ice melting is the major factor behind increased polar motion, groundwater depletion also adds to the phenomenon. As millions of tonnes of water from below the land is pumped out every year for drinking, industries or agriculture, most of it eventually joins the sea, thus redistributing the planet's mass.

6. Public Buildings and Fire Safety

In news

• Over the past year, there have been deadly fires in hospital buildings, including those treating COVID-19 patients.

Key takeaways

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) says 330 people died in commercial building fires in 2019.
- Fatalities for residential or dwelling buildings: 6,329.
- Electrical faults are cited as the leading cause of fires
- State governments are widely criticised for being lax with building safety laws and for failing to equip public buildings with modern technology.
- Hospital ICUs (intensive care units) are a great fire risk because they are oxygen-suffused, and need to meet high standards.
- Part 4 of the National Building Code of India deals with Fire and Life Safety.
- The document provides specifications and guidelines for design and materials that reduce the threat of destructive fires.
- Hospitals come under the institutional category in the code.

7. Seven Indian Navy Ships Deployed for Op Samudra Setu II

Operation Samudra Setu II

- In support of the nation's fight against Covid-19 and as part of operation 'Samudra Setu II', seven Indian Naval ships have been deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries.
- Indian Navy also has the surge capability, to deploy more ships when the need arises to further nation's fight against COVID-19.

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• It is pertinent that the ships are **combat ready** and capable of meeting any contingency in keeping with the attributes of versatility of sea power.

Operation Samudra Setu I

• It may be recalled that **Operation Samudra Setu** was launched last year by the Navy and around 4000 Indian citizens stranded in neighbouring countries, amidst COVID 19 outbreak, were successfully repatriated back to India.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Shramik Kalyan Portal is associated with which of the following?

- a. Indian Railways
- b. Ministry of Mines
- c. Ministry of Labour and Employment
- d. Indian Council of Agricultural Research

Answer : a

Explanation:

- Indian Railways ensures 100% compliance of payment of minimum wages to contract workers through e-application Shramik Kalyan Portal.
- E-Application ensures the compliance of provisions of Minimum Wages Act and also ensures that contractual workers working in Indian Railways get their rightful due by enforcing the contractors to regularly upload wage payment data into e-application.
- This helps Railways as Principal Employer, in keep vigil over wages disbursed by contractors to contract workers.

2. Consider the following statements regarding the Armenian Genocide:

- 1. It is called the first genocide of the 20th century.
- 2. India has not formally recognised the Armenian Genocide.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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

Answer :D

Explanation

- Recently, the US President officially recognised the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks in 1915-16 as an act of genocide.
 - The Armenian diaspora marks 24th April as Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.
 - The Armenian Genocide is called the first genocide of the 20th century. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
 - It refers to the systematic annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1917.
- India, that has not formally recognised the Armenian Genocide has primarily adopted this stance in the interests of its wider foreign policy decisions and geo-political interests in the region. Hence, statement 2 is correct.
- India does not have any domestic law on genocide, even though it has ratified the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

3. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)?

- 1. It has 47 members elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis.
- 2. It is headquartered at Geneva, Switzerland.
- 3. India is currently a member.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation

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- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a United Nations body whose mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world. The UNHRC has 47 members elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis. The headquarters of UNHRC is in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The UNHRC was established by the UN General Assembly to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights. The UNHRC works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and engages the UN's special procedures

4. Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Chandlers Good Governance Index is released by Singapore.
- 2. Sweden is ranked first in the Chandlers Good Governance Index.
- 3. India's Good Governance Index is released by NITI Aayog.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- Recently, India has been ranked 49th in the Chandler Good Government Index (CGGI).
 - Finland has topped the list. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.
- The CGGI is released by the Chandler Institute of Governance which is a private nonprofit organization headquartered in Singapore. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
 - The Index classifies 104 countries in terms of government capabilities and outcomes.
- India's Good Governance Index is launched by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions to determine the status of governance in the country. Hence, statement 3 is not correct.
 - It assesses the impact of various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs.

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5. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Project DANTAK is a project of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).
- 2. DANTAK was tasked to construct the pioneering motorable roads in Bhutan.
- 3. The BRO works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- **Project DANTAK** was established on 24th April1961. It is one of the oldest Projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) commemorating its Diamond Jubilee in Bhutan. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It was a result of the visionary leadership of the third King of Bhutan and then Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru.
 - DANTAK was tasked to construct the pioneering motorable roads. Hence, statement 2 is correct.
- BRO was conceived and raised in 1960 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for coordinating the speedy development of a network of roads in the North and the North Eastern border regions of the country.
 - It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence. Hence, statement 3 is not correct.

6. Consider the following statements regarding cropping systems:

- 1. Agroforestry promotes spatial diversity only.
- 2. Crop rotation equally promotes both spatial and temporal diversity of crops.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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



Answer : D

Explanation

- Agroforestry is growing crops and trees together on the same field.
 - It promotes both spatial and temporal diversity. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.
- Mostly **temporal diversity** is achieved through **crop rotation as it is sequential cropping. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. What do you understand by interim budget? How is it different from the annual budget? (150 words)

Approach:

- Introduce by explaining what an interim budget means.
- Discuss the needs for presenting interim budget.
- Elaborate on how an Interim budget is different from full-fledged annual budget.

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2Q.What do you understand by environmental ethics and what is its significance? (150 words)

Approach:

- Define environmental ethics in introduction.
- Elaborate on its significance for man and environment.
- Conclude by giving emphasis on the need to understand the environment ethics for survival of mother earth.