

www.vishnuias.com



MAY

08.05.2021

CURRENT AFFAIRS

A MAGAZINE FOR CIVIL SERVICES PREPARATION

JOIN OUR TELEGRAM: <https://t.me/vishnuiasmentor>

**Articles of the day
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**

UPSC

General Studies

Test Series

**Online &
Offline
classes**

**One-Stop
Solution**

**Free daily
materials**

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. G7 Foreign Ministers' Meet

Why in News

Recently, Foreign Ministers from the **Group of Seven (G7) countries (USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan)** held a meeting in London, UK.

- The **47th G7 Summit** will be held in **June 2021**. The **UK** is the **host country**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - **Invited Guests:**
 - **Australia, India, South Korea, South Africa** and the **Chair (Brunei Darussalam) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**.
 - **Australia, India, South Korea and South Africa will also join the G7 Summit in June.**
 - **Discussions:**
 - **Russia's Irresponsible and Destabilising Behaviour:** This includes the **large build-up of Russian military forces on Ukraine's borders** and in **illegally-annexed Crimea**.
 - **Related to China:** Human rights violations and **abuses in Xinjiang and in Tibet, especially the targeting of Uyghurs**, members of other ethnic and religious minority groups.
 - **Called on China to respect Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy** and rights and freedoms (**Basic Law**).
 - **Condemned the military coup in Myanmar.**
 - **Indo-Pacific:**
 - Support for the **centrality of ASEAN on the Indo-Pacific**.
 - Reiterated the **importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific** which is inclusive and based on the rule of law, democratic values, territorial integrity, transparency, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
 - **International Rules-based Order:**
 - This can be described as a shared commitment by all countries to conduct their activities in accordance with agreed rules that evolve over time, such as international

law, regional security arrangements, trade agreements, immigration protocols, and cultural arrangements.

- **Group of Seven (G7):**

- **About:**

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was **formed in 1975**.
- The bloc **meets annually** to discuss issues of common interest like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.
- The G7 **does not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters**. The **decisions** taken by leaders during **annual summits** are **non-binding**.
 - The **groundwork for the summit**, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is **done by the “sherpas”**, who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.
 - The **leaders of important international organizations** like **European Union, IMF, World Bank** and the **United Nations** are also invited.

- **Issues:**

- Not all of the G7 countries are among the most advanced now. India is both a military and economic giant but isn't part of the G7. So, its expansion, just like that of the United Nations Security Council, is called for.

- **India and G7:**

- **Previous Participation:**

- The **participation of India at the 45th summit in Biarritz, France, in August 2019** is a reflection of deepening strategic partnership and **recognition of India as a major economic power**.
- India was **also invited for the 2020 summit hosted by the USA** which could not take place due to the pandemic.
- Previously **India had attended the G8 summit** (it became G7 from G8 with the expulsion of Russia in 2014) **five times between 2005 and 2009**.

- **Significance of India's Engagement with G7:**

- It provides an opportunity for India **to develop cordial relations with developed countries**.
- It will **boost security cooperation with member countries in Indo-Pacific**, particularly the Indian ocean.
- As **current president of Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS)** and **G20 president in 2023**, India will play a key role driving

in multilateral cooperation helping to build back better around the world.

2. Rent issues as an ignored COVID stress point

Context

- Rent issues in the times of Covid-19 within informal rental housing markets.

Issues faced by migrant workers

- Many migrants have left cities and have gone back to their villages mentioning rent payments as the main reason.
- Most daily-wage earners had not received their wages and indebtedness had increased post-lockdown in the first wave. Rent was a majority component of debt.
 - Even in cases where the rent was deferred, it led to a piling up of debts for domestic workers.
- With pending rent, with no wages and salaries, many domestic workers had to borrow from informal moneylenders, where the rate of interest in a few cases was exorbitant.
- Some domestic workers borrowed from their employers, on the condition of paying it off with their work over the next few months, which meant a further paucity in income.

Concerns

- Media attention and administrative focus is more towards food and income support, the issue of rent does not get much attention.

Way forward

It is imperative that we learn from the lessons of the first wave and protect the rental housing of informal workers early, effectively, and expansively.

- First, a moratorium should be announced with instructions clearly expressed for enforcement mechanism and a clear distinction has to be drawn between deferment and rent waivers.
 - Support has to be sorted from worker unions and organizations for aid enforcement.
 - The state should offer partial compensation to the owners rather than shifting the onus on the workers.

- Second, cash transfers being conceptualised by many State governments must treat rent on par with food and income support.
 - The amount of cash transfer for rent support should be on the basis of the rental market conditions.
- Third, States can also aid workers through limited waivers on utility expenses.
 - For example, the electricity bills and penalties charged on non-payment were quite a burden for domestic workers.

Conclusion

Going forward we need to bring together food, income and rent so that no person is forced to leave the city of their dreams and aspirations.

3. Myanmar's Karen insurgents burn another govt. outpost

Context:

Guerrilla soldiers from Myanmar's **Karen ethnic minority** burned down a government military outpost after capturing it.

Details:

- The **Karen and the Kachin in northern Myanmar** are the two **major ethnic armed organisations** that have allied themselves with the movement against the junta that took power in Myanmar after the Army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Government offensive is underway against the Kachin and the Karen that maintain their own armed force and also has been the target of airstrikes.
- The fighting in Kachin and Karen states has displaced more than 45,000 villagers.
- The **role of the ethnic fighting groups has become more important** as the number of people joining street protests in Myanmar's cities and towns has declined, in large part due to deadly violence used by security forces to suppress them.

4. CJI nominates four vacation Benches

Context:

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana **nominated four separate Benches of the Supreme Court** to sit consecutively in May 2021, to hear extremely urgent cases.

Details:

- The decision to have two separate Division Benches sitting in a week during vacations is significant considering the fact that petitions may be filed concerning COVID management and connected human rights issues.
- The Vacation Benches will hear the cases virtually.

What is Vacation Bench of Supreme Court?

- A Vacation Bench of the Supreme Court is a **special bench constituted by the Chief Justice of India.**
- **The court takes two long vacations each year, the summer and winter breaks, but is technically not fully closed during these periods.**
- Litigants can still approach the Supreme Court and, if the court decides that the **plea is an urgent matter**, the **Vacation Bench hears the case on its merits.**
- While there is no specific definition as to what is an “urgent matter”, during vacations the **court generally admits writs related to habeas corpus, certiorari, prohibition and quo warranto matters for enforcement of any fundamental right.**

Note:

The High Courts and trial courts too have Vacation Benches to hear urgent matters under their jurisdiction.

5. Nasheed 'critical', remains in intensive care

Context:

Speaker of the **Maldives Parliament and the first democratically elected President of the Indian Ocean Archipelago Mohamed Nasheed** sustained multiple injuries in a **targeted explosion** that the Maldives police described as an act of terror.

Issue:

- The Maldives suffers from **regular political turmoil.**
- Nasheed rose to become the **Maldives' first democratically elected leader in 2008** in the country's first multi-party elections **after 30 years of autocratic rule.**

- Also, he is a former **Amnesty International prisoner of conscience** after being sentenced to **13 years in prison in 2015 on terrorism charges** slammed as politically motivated by civil rights groups.
- The Maldives **government has cracked down on extremism and preaching is highly regulated** and violent attacks have been rare. However, a dozen foreign tourists were wounded by a bomb blast in Male in 2007.
- While the Islamic State claimed a boat arson attack in 2020, there is little evidence the group has a presence in the archipelago.

Prisoner of conscience:

- A prisoner of conscience (POC) is **anyone imprisoned because of their race, sexual orientation, religion, or political views.**
- The term also refers to **those who have been imprisoned or persecuted for the nonviolent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.**
- The term is most often **associated with** the human rights organisation **Amnesty International.**
- Amnesty International has, since its founding, pressured governments to release those persons it considers to be prisoners of conscience.

Note:

- Amnesty International had also recognized **Irom Sharmila Chanu** from India and **Aung San Suu Kyi** from Myanmar as prisoners of conscience, among others.

6. Four-digit security code in CoWIN portal from today

What's in News?

In order to minimise errors and inconvenience caused to citizens registering for COVID-19 vaccination, the CoWIN system will introduce a four-digit security code in its portal.

- **COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (CoWIN) system** is a digitalised platform to be used to **effectively roll out and scale up the mechanism for COVID Vaccine Distribution System**, nationally.
- It is a **digital platform launched by MoHFW** to help agencies keep a track of Covid-19 vaccination and allow Indians to apply for the vaccine.
- It is a **repurposed version of the Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN).**

7. Dahla Dam

Why in News

Recently, the Taliban has captured Afghanistan's second-biggest dam - Dahla Dam.

Key Points

- **Dahla Dam:**
 - The Dahla Dam is also known as **Arghandab Dam**.
 - It is **located** in the **Shah Wali Kot District of Kandahar Province, Afghanistan**.
 - It was constructed in **1952** by the **USA**.
 - It is built on the **Arghandab River**.
- **Dams built by India in Afghanistan:**
 - Pact for Construction of **Shahtoot Dam on Kabul River**.
 - **Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam)**.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

8. India's Sovereign Rating

Why in News

According to the **S&P Global Ratings**, **India's sovereign rating will remain unchanged at the current level of BBB-** for the next two years despite the potential adverse impact of surging **pandemic** on its economy.

- S&P is one of the **largest credit rating agencies**, assigning letter grades to companies and countries and the debt they issue on a scale of AAA to D, indicating their degree of investment risk.

Key Points

- **Sovereign Credit Rating:**

- A sovereign credit rating is **an independent assessment of the creditworthiness of a country or sovereign entity**.
- It can give investors insights into the level of risk associated with investing in the debt of a particular country, including any political risk.
- In addition to **issuing bonds** in external debt markets, another common motivation for countries to obtain a sovereign credit rating is **to attract foreign direct investment (FDI)**.
- At the request of the country, a credit rating agency will evaluate its economic and political environment to assign it a rating.
 - S&P gives a BBB- or higher rating to countries it considers investment grade, and grades of BB+ or lower are deemed to be speculative or "junk" grade.
 - Moody's considers a Baa3 or higher rating to be of investment grade, and a rating of Ba1 and below is speculative.
- **Sovereign Credit Ratings and India:**
 - **The Economic Survey 2020-21** has called for sovereign credit ratings methodology to be made more **transparent, less subjective and better attuned to reflect an economy's fundamentals**.
 - Within its sovereign credit ratings cohort – countries rated between A+/A1 and BBB-/Baa3 – India is a clear outlier on several parameters i.e. a sovereign whose rating is significantly lower than mandated by the effect on the sovereign rating of the parameter.
 - These include GDP growth rate, inflation, general government debt (as % of GDP), cyclically adjusted primary balance (as % of potential GDP), current account balance (as % of GDP), political stability, rule of law, control of corruption, investor protection, ease of doing business, short-term external debt (as % of reserves), reserve adequacy ratio and sovereign default history.
 - The outlier status remains true not only now but also during the last two decades.
 - The Survey observes that India's willingness to pay is unquestionably demonstrated through its **zero sovereign default history**.
 - India's ability to pay can be gauged not only by the extremely low foreign currency-denominated debt of the sovereign but also by the comfortable size of its foreign exchange reserves that can pay for the short term debt of the private sector as well as the entire stock of India's sovereign and non-sovereign external debt.

Credit Rating

- A credit rating is a quantified assessment of the **creditworthiness of a borrower** in general terms or with respect to a particular debt or financial obligation.
- A credit rating can be assigned to any entity that seeks to borrow money – an individual, corporation, state or provincial authority, or sovereign government.
- **A rating agency** is a company that assesses the financial strength of companies and government entities, especially their ability to meet principal and interest payments on their debts.
- **Fitch Ratings, Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's (S&P)** are the big three international credit rating agencies controlling approximately 95% of global ratings business.
- In **India**, there are six credit rating agencies registered under **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** namely, **CRISIL, ICRA, CARE, SMERA, Fitch India and Brickwork Ratings**.

9. RBI sets up panel to assist regulatory review authority

What's in News?

The Reserve Bank has **constituted an advisory group to assist the second Regulatory Review Authority (RRA)**.

- The group will assist the RRA by **identifying regulations, guidelines, and returns that can be rationalised**.
- The RBI has set up the second regulatory review authority (RRA 2.0), **for a period of one year from May 1, 2021, with a view to streamline regulations and reduce the compliance burden of regulated entities**.

10. Recent Findings about Venus

Why in News

Recently, scientists have obtained **new data about Venus by bouncing radio waves off the planet**.

- The scientists **transmitted radio waves toward Venus 21 times from 2006 to 2020 from NASA's Goldstone Antenna in the Mojave Desert of California** and studied the radio echo, which provided information on certain planetary traits.

Key Points

- **Latest Findings:**
 - A single Venusian **rotation takes 243.0226 Earth days**. This means a **day lasts longer than a year on Venus**, which makes a **complete orbit around the sun in 225 Earth days**.
 - The **Venusian planetary core has a diameter of about 7,000 km**, comparable to **Earth's core** which is **6,970 km**.
 - The **Venusian tilt is at about 2.64 degrees**. Earth's is about **23.5 degrees**.
- **Previous Findings:**
 - **Presence of phosphine** was detected in the atmosphere of Venus. This indicates the possibility of the presence of lifeforms on Venus.
 - According to a study published in **Nature Geoscience**, Venus is still **geologically active**.
 - The study identified **37 active volcanoes**, in the form of ring-like structures known as coronae, on the surface of Venus.
- **About Venus :**
 - Venus, the **second planet from the sun**, is similar in structure but slightly smaller than Earth (**Earth's Twin**).
 - It has a **thick and toxic atmosphere** that consists primarily of carbon dioxide, with clouds of sulfuric acid droplets.
 - With a **runaway greenhouse effect**, its surface temperatures reach 471 degrees Celsius, hot enough to melt lead.
 - The phenomenon, called the '**runaway greenhouse' effect**, occurs when a planet absorbs more energy from the sun than it can radiate back to space. Under these circumstances, the hotter the surface temperature gets, the faster it warms up.
 - Venus is **one of just two planets that rotate from east to west**. Only **Venus and Uranus** have this "backwards" rotation.
 - Venus has **no moons and no rings**.
 - On Venus, **one day-night cycle takes 117 Earth days** because Venus rotates in the direction opposite of its orbital revolution around the Sun.
- **Missions Related to Venus:**
 - **ISRO Shukrayaan: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is also planning a mission to Venus, tentatively called Shukrayaan
 - **Akatsuki** (Japanese 2015)
 - **Venus Express** (European Space Agency 2005)
 - **NASA's Magellan** (1989)

11. The fig leaf of patent protection has to drop

Background

- India and South Africa had asked the WTO to suspend Intellectual Property Rights related to COVID-19 for a limited period of time to help resolve the urgent issues blocking access to vaccines.
- The proposal had garnered significant support from the developing world.
- US, UK and the European Union (EU), among other richer countries, have been vocal opponents of the IP waiver proposal.
- The pharmaceutical industry fiercely opposed it and vigorously lobbied many governments. Right-wing political groups in the high-income countries sided with the industry.
- Since the WTO operates on consensus rather than by voting, the proposal did not advance despite drawing support from over 60 countries.

Specious reasons

- The pharmaceutical companies of the developed world feel the low and middle-income countries would not be in a position to assure quality vaccines as they do not have sophisticated laboratories and are limited in number. They feel this may compromise the safety of the vaccines.
 - These arguments are not valid and spell hypocrisy.
 - The pharmaceutical manufacturers have no reservations about contracting industries in those countries to manufacture their patent-protected vaccines for the global market.
 - The low labour costs in developing countries are attractive for the pharmaceutical companies which allows them to outsource their products for production. This shows they don't mind as long as their patents and profits are protected.
 - The counter to patent waiver is an offer to license manufacturers in developing countries while retaining patent rights.
 - This restricts the opportunity for production to a chosen few.
 - The terms of those agreements are opaque and offer no assurance of equity in access to the products at affordable prices, either to the country of manufacture or to other developing countries.
 - It was also stated that developing countries could be supplied vaccines through the COVAX facility, set up by several international agencies and donors.
 - While well-intended, it has fallen far short of promised delivery.
 - Some U.S. states have received more vaccines than entire Africa has from COVAX.
 - The trickle-down has not worked well in the global vaccine supply.

- An argument put forth by multinational pharmaceutical firms is that a breach in the patent will allow China to steal their technologies, now and in the future.
 - The original genomic sequence was openly shared by China, which gave these firms a head start in developing vaccines.

Concerns

- Countries like Canada and South Korea whose industries have the capability to manufacture, are ready to avail of patent waivers are not being allowed to enter a restricted circle.
- Patent waivers are also dismissed as useless on the grounds that the time taken for their utilisation by new firms will be too long to help combat the present pandemic.

Context

- The Biden administration has now backed the initiative by India and South Africa at the WTO to temporarily waive patent rules on COVID-19 vaccines.

Impact

- The Biden administration took such a major decision despite stiff opposition from major pharma companies and US Chambers of Commerce, which argued that this will impact their intellectual property.
- The Biden administration's decision will make it easier for the WTO's General Council to approve the proposal.
- The waiver would allow the production of vaccines to be ramped up and provide more affordable doses for less wealthy countries.

How have countries reacted?

- France and Russia have declared support.
- Germany has voiced its opposition.

Significance

- Patent waivers will benefit by increasing access not just to vaccines but also to essential drugs and diagnostics.

Way forward

The World Trade Organization resolves debates by consensus and not by voting. The process may drag on, despite U.S. intervention.

- Developing countries must start issuing compulsory licences. The Doha Declaration on TRIPS permits their use in a public health emergency.
- National governments must be trusted to promote credible companies and not permit businessmen who want to make money very quickly, without caring about the quality.
- High-income countries and multilateral agencies should provide financial and technical support to enable the expansion of global production capacity. That will reflect both altruism and enlightened self-interest.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Unique Disability Identification Portal

Why in News

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has issued a notification making it mandatory for all States/UTs to grant **certificate of disability** through online mode only using **UDID (Unique Disability ID)** portal w.e.f. 01.06.2021.

Key Points

- **Unique Disability Identification (UDID) Portal:**
 - The project is being implemented with a view of **creating a National Database for persons with disabilities (PwDs)**, and to issue a **Unique Disability Identity Card** to each PwDs.
 - The project will not only **encourage transparency, efficiency and ease of delivering the government benefits** to the person with disabilities, but also **ensure uniformity**.
 - The project will **also help in stream-lining the tracking of physical and financial progress of beneficiaries** at all levels of hierarchy of implementation – from village level, block level, District level, State level and National level.
- **Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016:**

- **Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016** replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- **Disability has been** defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- It **increases the quantum of reservation** for people suffering from disabilities **from 3% to 4% in government jobs** and **from 3% to 5% in higher education institutes**.
- This Act brings our law in line with the **United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, to which India is a signatory.
- **Other Programmes/Initiatives for Disableds:**
 - **Accessible India Campaign:** Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs.
 - **DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme:** Financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing various services to Persons with Disabilities.
 - **Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP):** It aims at helping the disabled persons by bringing suitable, durable, scientifically-manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances within their reach.
 - **National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities:** It aims to increase opportunities to students with disabilities for pursuing higher education.

2. Effect of Covid on Urban and Rural Poor

Why in News

Recently, a report by **Hunger Watch** claimed that **Covid-19 has left the urban poor in India poorer**, more hungry and with less nutrition than their rural counterparts.

- **Hunger Watch** is a loose collection of social groups and movements.
- Earlier, a **study from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** had found that an additional **207 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030** due to the severe long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Also a **new research conducted by Pew Research Center** has found that the **Covid-19 has pushed about 32 million Indians out of the middle class and increased poverty in the country**.

Key Points

- **Economic Effect:**
 - The food insecurity has prompted **more people to enter the labour force (55% increase in the labour force among the respondents)**.
 - It also noted a **silent rise in child labour as well**.
 - The **economic crisis was deepening as people who lost their jobs were yet to find replacements** and little had been accomplished after the **lockdown** for the revival of livelihoods in the informal sector.
 - Incomes **reduced by half or a quarter for more than half the urban respondents** while it was a little over **one-third for rural respondents**.
- **Public Distribution System & Social Sector Scheme Coverage:**
 - A large section of rural residents could cushion the blow of pandemic-driven economic disruption due to foodgrain via the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**. The urban poor's access to such ration, however, was minimal.
 - The **social security schemes also had relatively better coverage among the rural poor** as rural areas had better access to PDS rations.
 - A larger proportion of households in **urban areas did not have access to ration cards**.
- **Nutrition and Hunger:**
 - A **decline in nutritional quality and quantity was more among the urban respondents** as was the need to borrow money for buying food.
 - Overall, **levels of hunger and food insecurity remained high**, with little hope of the situation improving without measures specifically aimed at providing employment opportunities as well as food support.
 - Even when **India had a record food grain production at 296.65 million tonnes in the 2019-20 crop year (July-June)**, beating the target of 291.1 million tonnes and 4% higher than 2018-19, the **net of hunger became more widespread as more people had to start skipping some meals in a day**.
 - **Things were much worse for socially vulnerable groups** such as households headed by single women, households with people having disabilities, **transgender** people and old persons without caregivers.
- **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data:**
 - The figures in the Hunger Watch report are alarming, especially when seen in conjunction with the recent rounds of **NFHS data**.
 - The NFHS data has shown **either a worsening or stagnation in malnutrition** outcomes such as **prevalence of stunting and wasting among children** and **high levels of anaemia among women and children**.
- **Government Initiatives to Mitigate the Effects of Covid:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana**.

- Reserve Bank of India's Covid-19 Economic Relief Package.
- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (self-reliant India).

Way Forward

- Since the majority of the poor already had low incomes to begin with, a **further reduction in household income is akin to taking a bullet train to hunger**. This calls for **special attention on social protection measures** including schemes for provision of subsidised food and employment guarantee in urban areas.

3.Global Methane Assessment: Benefits and Costs of Mitigating Methane Emissions

Why in News

Recently, a report, titled **Global Methane Assessment: Benefits and Costs of Mitigating Methane Emissions** suggested that the world needs to dramatically cut methane emissions to avoid the worst of **climate change**.

- The report was released by the **Climate and Clean Air Coalition** and the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

Methane

- **About:**
 - Methane is gas that is found in small quantities in Earth's atmosphere. **Methane is the simplest hydrocarbon**, consisting of one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms (CH_4). **Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas**. It is **flammable**, and is used as a fuel worldwide.
 - Methane is **produced by the breakdown or decay of organic material** and can be **introduced into the atmosphere by either natural processes** – such as the decay of plant material in wetlands, the seepage of gas from underground deposits or the digestion of food by cattle – **or human activities** – such as oil and gas production, rice farming or waste management.
- **Impact of Methane:**
 - Methane is **84 times more potent than carbon** and **doesn't last as long in the atmosphere before it breaks down**. This makes it a critical target for reducing global warming more quickly while simultaneously working to reduce other greenhouse gases.

- It is **responsible for creating ground-level ozone**, a dangerous air pollutant.

Key Points

- **Current Situation:**
 - Human-caused **methane emissions are increasing faster currently** than at any other time since record keeping began in the 1980s.
 - **Carbon dioxide levels have dropped** during the **Covid-19 pandemic**. However, **methane in the atmosphere reached record levels last year**.
 - This is a cause of concern as it was **responsible for about 30% of warming since pre-industrial times**.
- **Reducing Methane Emissions from Major Sources:**
 - **Fossil Fuel:**
 - **Oil and gas extraction**, processing and distribution accounted for 23% of methane emissions in the fossil fuel sector. **Coal mining** accounted for 12% of emissions.
 - Fossil fuel industry had the **greatest potential for low-cost methane cuts**, up to 80% of measures in the oil and gas industry could be implemented at negative or low cost.
 - About 60% of methane cuts in this sector could make money as **reducing leaks would make more gas available for sale**.
 - **Waste:**
 - **Landfills and wastewater** made up about 20% of emissions in the waste sector.
 - The waste sector could cut its methane emissions by **improving the disposal of sewage around the world**.
 - **Agriculture:**
 - In the agricultural sector, **livestock emissions** from manure and enteric fermentation constituted for roughly 32% and rice cultivation 8% of emissions.
 - Three behavioural changes – **reducing food waste and loss, improving livestock management and adopting healthy diets** (vegetarian or with a lower meat and dairy content) – could reduce methane emissions by 65–80 million tonnes per year over the next few decades.
- **Region-wise Emission Reduction Potential:**
 - **Europe:**
 - Greatest potential to curb methane emissions from **farming, fossil fuel operations and waste management**.
 - The European Commission had adopted the **European Union Methane Strategy**.
 - **India:**

- Greatest potential to reduce methane emissions in the **waste sector**.
- **China:**
 - Mitigation potential was best in **coal production and livestock**.
- **Africa:**
 - Its potential to reduce methane emission was in **livestock, followed by oil and gas**.
- **Need and Benefits:**
 - Human-caused **methane emissions must be cut by 45%** to avoid the worst effects of climate change.
 - Such a cut would **prevent a rise in global warming by up to 0.3 degrees Celsius by 2045**. It would also **prevent 260,000 premature deaths, 775,000 asthma-related hospital visits annually, as well as 25 million tonnes of crop losses**.
 - However, **cutting methane emissions can rapidly reduce the rate of warming in the near-term** as the gas broke down quickly.

Related Indian Initiatives

- **Seaweed-Based Animal Feed:**
 - Central Salt & Marine Chemical Research Institute (CSMCRI) in collaboration with the country's three leading institutes developed a seaweed-based animal feed additive formulation that **aims to reduce methane emissions from cattle and also boost immunity of cattle and poultry**.
- **India Greenhouse Gas Program:**
 - The India GHG Program led by WRI India (non-profit organization), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and **The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)** is an industry-led voluntary framework to **measure and manage greenhouse gas emissions**.
 - The programme **builds comprehensive measurement and management strategies to reduce emissions** and drive more profitable, competitive and sustainable businesses and organisations in India.
- **National Action Plan on Climate Change:**
 - The **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** was launched in 2008 which aims at creating awareness among the representatives of the public, different agencies of the government, scientists, industry and the communities on the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.
- **Bharat Stage-VI Norms:**
 - India shifted from **Bharat Stage-IV (BS-IV) to Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI)** emission norms.

Climate and Clean Air Coalition

- **Launched** in 2019, It is a **voluntary partnership** of governments, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, scientific institutions and civil society organizations **committed to protecting the climate and improving air quality through actions** to reduce short-lived climate pollutants.
 - **India is a member** of the coalition.

United Nations Environment Programme

- **Launch:**
 - The UNEP is a leading global environmental authority **established on 5th june 1972.**
- **Functions:**
 - It sets the **global environmental agenda, promotes the sustainable development** within the **United Nations** system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for global environment protection.
- **Major Reports:**
 - **Emission Gap Report, Global Environment Outlook, Frontiers, Invest into Healthy Planet.**
- **Major Campaigns:**
 - Beat Pollution, UN75, **World Environment Day, Wild for Life.**
- **Headquarters:**
 - Nairobi, Kenya.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4.Regulations Review Authority 2.0

Why in News

Recently, the **Reserve Bank Of India (RBI)** has **constituted an Advisory Group to assist the second Regulations Review Authority (RRA 2.0).**

- The RBI has set up the **RRA 2.0, initially for a period of one year from 1st May, 2021,** with a view to **streamline regulations and reduce the compliance burden of regulated entities.**

Key Points

- **Background:**

- In 1999, the RBI had set up a **Regulations Review Authority (RRA)** for reviewing the regulations, circulars, reporting systems, based on the feedback from the public, banks, and financial institutions.
- **RRA 2.0:**
 - It will focus on **streamlining regulatory instructions, reducing compliance burden** of the **regulated entities** by **simplifying procedures** and **reducing reporting requirements**, wherever possible.
 - It will also obtain feedback from regulated entities.
 - **Regulated entities** include **commercial banks, urban co-operative banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies.**

Reserve Bank of India

- **Formation:**
 - RBI was established on **1st April, 1935** in accordance with the provisions of the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.**
 - Though originally privately owned, since nationalization in 1949, the Reserve Bank is **fully owned by the Government of India.**
- **Major Functions:**
 - **Monetary Authority:** Formulates, implements and monitors the **monetary policy.**
 - **Recent Initiative: Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP).**
 - **Regulator and supervisor of the financial system:** Prescribes broad parameters of banking operations within which the country's banking and financial system functions.
 - **Manager of Foreign Exchange:** Manages the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.
 - **Issuer of currency:** Issues and exchanges or destroys currency and coins not fit for circulation.
 - **Developmental role:** Performs a wide range of promotional functions to support national objectives.
 - **Regulator and Supervisor of Payment and Settlement Systems:** Introduces and upgrades safe and efficient modes of payment systems in the country to meet the requirements of the public at large.
 - **Recent Initiatives: Digital Payments Index, Payments Infrastructure Development Fund**
 - **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**, an umbrella organisation for all retail payments systems in India, was set up with the guidance and support of the RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA).
 - **Related Functions:**

- **Banker to the Government:** performs merchant banking function for the central and the state governments; also acts as their banker.
- **Banker to banks:** maintains banking accounts of all scheduled banks.
- The **Ways and Means Advances (WMA)** are short-term loan facilities which allow the Centre and states to borrow funds from the RBI to bridge their temporary mismatch between expenditure and receipts.
- **RBI's Publications:**
 - **Consumer Confidence Survey (CCS - Quarterly)**
 - **Inflation Expectations Survey of Households (IESH - Quarterly)**
 - **Financial Stability Report (Half-Yearly)**
 - **Monetary Policy Report (Half-Yearly)**
 - **Report on Foreign Exchange Reserves (Half-Yearly)**

5. Mini-Seed Kits to boost pulses output in kharif 2021

Central government to distribute mini-kits of seed

- The government on said it will distribute over 20 lakh mini-kits of seeds worth Rs 82.01 crore as **part of a strategy to boost pulses production** in the kharif season of the 2021-22 crop year.
- The total cost for these mini-kits will be borne by the central government to boost the production and productivity of tur, moong and urad.
- In addition to this, the **usual programme of inter-cropping and area expansion** by the states will continue on a sharing basis between the Centre and state, it said.

Increasing production and productivity

- From a meagre production of 14.76 million tonnes in the 2007-08 crop year, pulses production has now reached **24.42 million tonnes in the 2020-2021** crop year, which is a phenomenal increase of 65 per cent.
- India is still importing around 4 lakh tonnes of tur, 0.6 lakh tonnes of moong and around 3 lakh tonnes of urad for meeting its demand.
- The special programme will increase the production and productivity of the three pulses of tur, moong and urad to a great extent and will play an important role in reducing the import burden.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following Commissions recommended that Governors must not be removed before completion of their five year tenure, except in rare and compelling circumstances?

- 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission
- Punchi Commission
- Sarkaria Commission
- Rajmannar Commission

Answer: c

Explanation

- The Sarkaria Commission had recommended that Governors must not be removed before completion of their five-year tenure, except in rare and compelling circumstances.
- It also suggested that the Governor should be an eminent person from outside the State and should be a detached figure without intense political links or should not have taken part in politics in the recent past.

2. Consider the following statements about Raja Suheldev:

- He ruled in present day Gujarat and was a contemporary of Muhammad of Ghor.
- Mirat-i-Masudi is the biography of Raja Suheldev written by Salar Masud.

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

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Explanation

- Raja Suheldev** was the erstwhile ruler of Shravasti in Uttar Pradesh's (UP) **Bahraich district**, who ruled in the **11th century**.
 - He is known in history for **waging guerrilla warfare against Mahmud Ghazni's large army**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.

- Mohammad of Ghor was a 12th century ruler.
- **Raja Suheldev finds mention in 'Mirat-i-Masudi'**, a 17th century Persian-language historical account.
 - **'Mirat-i-Masudi' is the biography of Salar Masud**, written by Abd-ur-Rahman Chishti during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605–1627). **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

3. Which of the following organization has initiated the traceability software system *GrapeNet*?

- a. Food Corporation of India (FCI)
- b. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)
- c. Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)
- d. Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

Answer : c

Explanation:

GrapeNet

- It is a web based certification and traceability software system for monitoring fresh grapes exported from India to the European Union.
- APEDA can trace details of the consignment right upto the farm plot level.
- It collects, stores and reports, forward and backward traces and quality assurance data entered by the stakeholders within the Grapes supply chain in India.
- The Blockchain of GrapeNet will help track all the activities and steps involved in the grapes lifecycle process.
- It will help track right from the allocation of the farms for production of the grapes to the point of grapes being delivered to the customers.

APEDA

- It is an authority established under an act of parliament.
- It is under the administrative control of Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It has been mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the scheduled products.
- It replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPCC).
- APEDA has been entrusted with the responsibility to monitor import of sugar.

4. With reference to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), consider the following statements:

1. All the members of the United Nations Organisation hold the membership of WTO too.
2. The WTO was established with the signing of the Marrakesh Agreement.

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

- Nigeria's **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** was appointed as Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the leading international trade body.
- The WTO has 164 members (including European Union) and 23 observer governments (like Iran, Iraq, Bhutan, Libya etc). Whereas currently the UN has 193 member States. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The Agreement Establishing the WTO, commonly known as the “**Marrakesh Agreement**”, was signed in Marrakesh, Morocco in 1994". **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

5. Which of the following statements are *incorrect* with respect to *Mandarin Duck*

1. It is a small-exotic bird native to East Asia.
2. It is very rare to spot and mentioned as critically endangered under IUCN Red list.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

Explanation:

Mandarin Duck

- It is considered the most beautiful duck in the world, was first identified by Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758.
- Though it's native to East Asia, now it has established populations in Western Europe and America also.
- It is mentioned as Least Concern under IUCN Red list.
- The duck, however, rarely visits India as it does not fall in its usual migratory route.

6. Nainativu and Neduntheevu are located in:

- a. Palk Bay
- b. Persian Gulf
- c. Gulf of Cambay
- d. Gulf of Oman

Answer: a

Explanation:

Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu are located in Palk Bay, some 50 km off Tamil Nadu.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. A better solution than privatization may well be giving Public Sector Banks autonomy to reform themselves and function free of political interference. Justify.

Approach

- Start the answer by mentioning the context of the need for privatization of banks.
- Mention the rationale of Privatisation of Banks followed by the arguments against it.
- Conclude Suitably.

2Q. The real challenge to India's food security is poor grain management rather than a shortage of grain production. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Highlight grain production (supply-demand) with some facts, is not a problem
- Highlight challenges in grain management i.e. supply chain. Consequently or simultaneously relate these issues with Food Security.
- Steps to resolve issues as way forward.