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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Inflation eases to 4.29%; base lifts IIP

Data from the National Statistical Office:

- India's retail inflation slowed to a three-month low of 4.29% in April, helped by **softer food prices as well as a base effect**.
- The industrial output surged by 22.4% in March, aided by the **statistical impact** of the year-earlier period's Index of Industrial Production (IIP) being significantly lower on account of the national lockdown to contain COVID-19 imposed that month.
- Though some experts have pointed out that the inflation and IIP data provided strong positive signals for the economy, others have pointed out to the fact that these figures are related to the period 'just prior to the extensive rounds of lockdowns induced by the ongoing second COVID wave' and have also emphasised that inflation and IIP data over the next three months were likely to be 'significantly distorted' by base effects.

2. WTO chief targets waivers for COVID vaccines in Dec.

Context:

- **World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-General** Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's statements.

Details:

IP waiver issue:

- The WTO DG has said that given the urgent need to vaccinate the world faster, she was pushing for **member-nations to reach some agreement by July** and deliver a final outcome on the intellectual property (IP) waivers for COVID-19 vaccines at the **next WTO ministerial conference scheduled in Geneva in December**.
- The WTO DG appreciated the fact that **India has exported more than 40% of the vaccines** and do so despite some countries' refusal to share their domestic production with other countries in dire need.

Package on agriculture:

- She has expressed hope that WTO could come up with a package on agriculture that would ensure a balance between the interests of both the developed and developing countries.
- The package on agriculture would include the following aspects.
 - Addressing the issue of **public stockholdings** and making these provisions permanent, while ensuring appropriate transparency in its functioning. This would help meet food security concerns on a permanent basis.
 - Public stockholding (PSH) is a policy tool used by governments to procure, stockpile and distribute food when needed. Governments purchasing at prices higher than market prices are considered to be subsidising their farmers, under WTO rules.
 - **The stockholding programmes are considered to distort trade** when they involve purchases from farmers at prices fixed by the governments.
 - The **Bali peace clause** stipulates that no country would be legally barred from food security programs for its own people even if the subsidy breached the limits specified in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.
 - **Domestic support to agriculture** also needs review.
 - Under the Agreement on Agriculture, all domestic support in favour of agricultural producers is subject to rules. In addition, **the aggregate monetary value of Amber Box measures is, with certain exceptions, subject to reduction commitments** as specified in the schedule of each WTO Member providing such support.

Issues related to industries:

- Industrial subsidies need to be reviewed.
 - The **WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures** (also known as the Subsidies Agreement or the SCM Agreement) establishes multilateral disciplines on the use of subsidies and provides mechanisms for challenging government measures that contravene these rules.

3. 'Remote working spurs demand for cyber experts'

- Remote working, new ways of managing workflows and efforts to ensure business continuity during the lockdowns have made **companies increasingly vulnerable to cyberthreats**. This has exponentially increased the risk of cybersecurity failures.

- To combat this, global enterprises are beefing up their cybersecurity to avoid possible catastrophes.
- Demand for cybersecurity professionals has more than doubled now from a year earlier after **cybersecurity emerged as a key concern following the pandemic**.
- In 2021 alone, India will require some 70,000 people with crucial skills such as application development security, cloud security, risk management, threat intelligence, incident response, data privacy and security strategy.

4. 'Child marriages may go unnoticed amid lockdown'

Context:

- With the ongoing lockdown in the state of Karnataka and the weddings being restricted to houses because of tough guidelines, there are **fears of child marriages** going unnoticed.

Background:

- The 2020 lockdown witnessed a slew of child marriages being reported in Karnataka.
- **A total of 2,180 child marriage cases were reported in Karnataka as per reports of Childline (1098) from April 2020 to January 2021.**
 - The other complaints ranged from illegal adoptions, child trafficking and child labour to the need for medical help or shelter.
- The number of complaints eased when lockdown restrictions were relaxed but were still worrying.

Details:

- The Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) expects the number of child marriages to go up, given that another lockdown is in place and marriages are being allowed in homes.
- Earlier, when child marriages happened at wedding halls, temples, etc., there were people who would alert the relevant authorities or activists who would be able to reach on time to stop the marriage. But now, with marriages happening at homes, **the authorities would be getting fewer alerts.**

Factors at play:

- The increasing number of child marriages could be attributed to the factors ranging from **insecurity for the girl**, wherein the parents assume their responsibility is over with her marriage, to the fact that they could get away with a simple marriage without calling too many people, resulting in less

expenditure. The increased **financial strain** on the poor has also contributed to some families resorting to child marriage.

Recommendations:

- There is a need to **create awareness among the people on the ills of child marriage**.
- People should alert Childline if they come across child marriages.
- The district authorities should constitute a **committee to tackle child marriages** and they should **conduct regular inspections in the most vulnerable areas**.

5. A hundred days after the coup

Context:

- **ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta.**
 - The single most important agenda of the summit was to devise a way to defuse the **ongoing crisis in Myanmar**.

Background:

Military coup in Myanmar and associated violence:

- On February 1, the military overthrew the elected government of Myanmar after the landslide victory of the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) in the November 2020 elections.
- Civilians have clashed with police and army units wielding batons, rubber bullets and live ammunition. The military leadership has been brutal in the suppression of the protests. 750 were killed, thousands injured, and over 2,500 detained.
- There has been a stalemate given the differing solutions being offered by the army on the one hand and the opposition on the other.

ASEAN mediation:

- Given the deep concerns over the coup's adverse regional impact, the ASEAN group, despite its **central concept of non-interference in internal affairs of its member states**, followed its **activist tradition to assist Myanmar in exiting from this complex situation**.
- It was in this direction that it has resisted efforts by other organizations or nations to interfere in the ongoing crisis and organized an **emergency summit at Jakarta and invited the military leadership of Myanmar for the talks**.

Important outcomes of the Jakarta summit:

- **Five-Point Consensus** including the immediate cessation of violence; supply of humanitarian assistance; constructive dialogue; and ASEAN's mediation through the visit by a special envoy of ASEAN's Chair and the ASEAN Secretary-General has been accepted by the military.
- Though not included in the five-point consensus, **calls for release of all political prisoners including foreigners were also heard by the army.**
- **International reactions to the Jakarta summit outcome have largely been positive.** The UN and other global stakeholders appreciate Southeast Asia's willingness to resolve its problems in its 'family way'.

Challenges for ASEAN in its efforts:

Bridge internal differences:

- Members like Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam inclined to be sympathetic to the military and others like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are keen to mediate in the Myanmar crisis for the region's larger good.

Chasm within the international community:

- The U.S., the U.K. and the European Union have advocated a policy of condemnation and strong sanctions against the military regime, while China and Russia have argued against excessive censure and opposition.

India's role:

- **As a neighbour with vital stakes, India has welcomed the ASEAN initiative.**
 - India and Japan have preferred to support reconciliation.
- India should **unreservedly back ASEAN's endeavours**, helping it further by extending requisite support to the member nations.

Conclusion:

- ASEAN has created a rare pathway to help Myanmar move forward.
 - Despite its initial opposition to the Jakarta agreement, the opposition in Myanmar would need to internalise the utility of a helping hand extended by the region.
 - Myanmar's leaders should work for a **lasting reconciliation**, deriving inspiration from Lord Buddha's 'Middle Path'.

6. COVID-19 catastrophe could have been avoided, says report

Context:

- The “COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic” report prepared by the **Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response**.
 - The panel notes that the catastrophic scale of the COVID-19 pandemic could have been prevented with appropriate interventions but the **failure at multiple levels** led to the catastrophic effect of the pandemic.

Failures:

- The **lack of transparency in reporting the initial cases by China** was an important contributing factor to the outbreak.
- Early responses to the outbreak detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 “lacked urgency” as many countries failed to heed the alarm. The poor coordination among the global institutions and nations meant **the warning signs went unheeded**.
- The report also notes with concern that the **institutions “failed to protect people”**. The panel said the **WHO could have declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern much earlier but failed to do so**. This resulted in eroding the potential of early actions in such situations. It was only in March after the WHO described it as a pandemic that countries were jolted into action.
- The science-denying leaders in some countries also **eroded public trust in health interventions and aided the spread of the pandemic**.

Way forward:

- The **global alarm system needs to be overhauled** to ensure timely alerts which can help initiate appropriate countermeasures.
- The report recommends the **overhauling of the WHO** to make it less cautious and give it **more authority** to send expert missions into countries immediately without waiting for their approval.
- To tackle the ongoing pandemic, the panel calls on the richest countries to donate a billion vaccine doses to the poorest. The WHO and the World Trade Organization should also get major vaccine-producing countries and manufacturers to agree to **voluntary licensing and technology transfers for vaccines**.

7. EdTech needs an ethics policy

- Since the onset of the pandemic, online education has replaced conventional classroom instruction. This has led to the **increasing use of EdTech apps**.

- The EdTech apps collect large quantities of data from the learners through the gadgets that the students use. These provide data about the learner's surroundings along with intimate data about the students.
- The privacy of students who use EdTech apps for learning is at risk.
 - The lack of a regulatory framework in India along the lines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe could impinge on the privacy of students who use educational technology (EdTech) apps for learning. Private data collected by an EdTech company can be misused or sold to other companies with no oversight or protection.
 - Children use these apps without parent or adult supervision. Intrusion of privacy can happen unnoticed.
- Given these realities, it is necessary to formulate an ethics policy for EdTech companies through the active participation of educators, researchers, parents, learners and industry experts. Issues of fairness, safety, confidentiality and anonymity of the user would have to be dealt with.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

8. A bullet train to hunger

Background:

Socio-economic impact of the pandemic:

- The pandemic and associated lockdowns have brought miseries upon millions of poor and vulnerable in India.
- Apart from the healthcare crisis, the poor are having to deal with **hunger and nutritional insecurity and also a sense of uncertainty about their livelihoods.**
 - As per the State of Working India report 2021 of Azim Premji University, nearly half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work between late 2019 and late 2020 and the poorest 20% of the households lost their entire incomes in April and May 2020. This indicates **massive job and income losses.**
 - Considering even the low national minimum wage threshold of Rs. 375 per day (Anoop Satpathy Committee), 23 crore individuals have been pushed below these minimal earnings. Consecutively, **poverty rates have increased.**
 - The 'Hunger Watch' (HW) has noted the **impact on nutritional security** due to the pandemic. The access to nutritional food has decreased owing to reduced incomes.

- The survey focussed on understanding the hunger and livelihood situation among marginalised communities such as daily wage workers, single women households, people with disability, etc.
- As per conservative estimates, there are at least 33 crore poor households in India. The lack of access to food can plunge this section of the population into irredeemable levels of **starvation and malnutrition**.
- The impact has been even worse on sections of the society considered most vulnerable like the minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, old age people, women. The pandemic has had a **disproportionate impact on some of these more vulnerable communities**.

The rural-urban divide:

- Several surveys and reports have indicated **a higher impact on the urban population as compared to the rural population due to the pandemic**.
 - **Incomes reduced** by half/quarter for more than half the urban respondents while it was a little over one-third for rural respondents. In October, in rural areas, 26% had no income while 30% had no income in urban areas.
 - **Poverty rates** in rural areas have increased by 15 percentage points and by 20 percentage points in urban areas.
 - For one in five rural respondents, the **nutritional quality of food** remained “more or less the same” in October compared to pre-pandemic levels. This was doubly worse for urban respondents.

Social security schemes:

Food security schemes:

- Under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)**, 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are entitled to 5 kg of foodgrains each month at subsidised prices.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana**, an additional entitlement of 5 kg of foodgrains per individual and 1 kg of pulses per household for free was given to those who hold Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cards under the NFSA. AAY cardholders fall under the extremely poor category.
- Supplementary rations were also made available under various State schemes.

Concerns:

- The NFSA suffers from exclusion issues due to identification errors as well as using old population estimates.
- PDS entitlements fall far short of minimal nutritional requirements for a healthy society.

MGNREGA:

- There has been a 47% increase in person-days of work under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20 and a record 72 lakh households completed 100 days of work in one year.
- The avenue for **guaranteed employment in rural areas** has perhaps cushioned the impact of income loss in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Recommendations:

- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of expanding social security nets. NFSA and MGNREGA have demonstrated the role they can play in addressing social and economic distress.
- **The government must bear the responsibility of social protection** and must consider implementing the following measures.
 - The Central government **must expand the coverage and quantity under the NFSA** for at least one year. Given that there are over 100 million tonnes of food grain stocks in the Food Corporation of India warehouses (as of May 1), the government can even consider universalizing the scheme.
 - **Increase MGNREGA entitlements** to 200 days per household.
 - Initiate consultations for an **urban employment programme**.
 - Offer a **wage compensation** of Rs. 7,000 per poor household for the next few months.

9. NITI Aayog's Project for Great Nicobar Island

- The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) – Infrastructure I of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has flagged serious concerns about **NITI Aayog's ambitious project for Great Nicobar Island**.

Key takeaways

- The committee has, however, removed the first hurdle faced by the project.

- It has “recommended” it “for grant of terms of reference (TOR)” for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies, which in the first instance will include baseline studies over three months.
- The proposal includes an international container transshipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, a power plant and a township complex spread over 166 sq. km. (mainly pristine coastal systems and tropical forests), and is estimated to cost ₹75,000 crore.

Important value additions

Galathea Bay

- Galathea Bay is the site of the port and the centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal.
- It is an iconic nesting site in India of the enigmatic Giant Leatherback, the world’s largest marine turtle.
- A number of species are restricted to just the Galathea region.
- These include the critically endangered Nicobar shrew, the Great Nicobar crane, the Nicobar frog, the Nicobar cat snake, a new skink (*Lipinia* sp), a new lizard (*Dibamus* sp,) and a snake of the *Lycodon* species that is yet to be described.

10. Aerial Passenger Ropeway System Between Dehradun and Mussoorie

- The Union Cabinet gave its approval to the transfer of land of Indo-Tibetan Border Police, ITBP to Government of Uttarakhand for development of Aerial Passenger Ropeway System between Dehradun and Mussoorie.

Key takeaways

- The proposed Ropeway is a mono-cable ropeway of 5.5 Km length between Purkul Gaon, Dehradun and Library, Mussoorie being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 285 crore.
- It will have a carrying capacity of 1,000 persons per hour per direction.
- This will considerably reduce the traffic flow on the road route from Dehradun to Mussoorie.
- This will generate direct employment of 350 and indirect employment of more than 1,500 people.
- It will also be a huge attraction for tourists which in turn will provide a boost to the tourism industry

Important value additions

Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)

- It is India's primary border patrol organization with its border with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.
- It was formed in 1962 in the wake of the Sino-Indian War of 1962.
- The "Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992" provides for the constitution and regulation of the ITBP for ensuring the security of the borders of India and for matters connected therewith.



GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Iron Dome Air Defence System: Israel

Why in News

Israel used its Iron Dome air defence system in recent violent clashes over Jerusalem.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It is a **short-range, ground-to-air, air defence system** that includes a **radar and Tamir interceptor missiles** that track and neutralise any rockets or missiles aimed at Israeli targets.
 - It is **used for countering** rockets, artillery & mortars as well as aircraft, helicopters and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV).
 - It is capable of being **used in all weather conditions**, including during the day and night.
 - It was **developed by the state-run Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries** and was **deployed in 2011**.
 - Rafael claims a **success rate of over 90%, with more than 2,000 interceptions**, however experts agree the **success rate is over 80%**.
 - It can **protect** deployed and manoeuvring forces, as well as the **Forward Operating Base (FOB)** and urban areas, against a wide range of indirect and aerial threats.
- **Components:**
 - The Iron Dome has **three main systems that work together** to provide a shield over the area where it is deployed which are:
 - **Radar:** It has a detection and tracking radar to spot any incoming threats.
 - **Weapon Control:** It has a battle management and weapon control system (BMC),
 - **Missile Fire:** It also has a missile firing unit. The **BMC basically liaises between the radar and the interceptor missile**.
- **Indian Alternatives:**
 - **S-400 TRIUMF:**
 - **About:**

- India has **S-400 TRIUMF**, which also caters to the three threats (rockets, missiles and cruise missiles). But they have **much longer range**.
- It has a much **larger air defence bubble** to knock off threats.
- It is a mobile, surface-to-air missile system (SAM) **designed by Russia**.
- **Range & Effectiveness:**
 - The system can **engage all types of aerial targets** within the **range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30km**.
 - The system can **track 100 airborne targets and engage six of them simultaneously**.
- **Prithvi Air Defence and Advance Air Defence:**
 - **About:**
 - It is a **double-tiered system consisting of two land and sea-based interceptor missiles**, namely the **Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)** missile for high altitude interception, and the **Advanced Air Defence (AAD)** Missile for lower altitude interception.
 - **Range:**
 - It is able to **intercept any incoming missile launched 5,000 kilometres away**. The system also **includes an overlapping network of early warning and tracking radars**, as well as command and **control posts**.
- **Ashwin Advanced Air Defence Interceptor Missile:**
 - **About:**
 - It is also an indigenously produced Advanced Air Defence (AAD) interceptor missile developed by **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
 - It is the advanced version of the low altitude supersonic ballistic interceptor missile.
 - The missile also **has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars**.
 - **Range:**
 - It uses an endo-spheric (within the Earth's atmosphere) interceptor that knocks out ballistic missiles at a maximum **altitude of 60,000 to 100,000 feet, and across a range between 90 and 125 miles**.

2. Article 311 of the Constitution

Why in News

Recently, a police officer was dismissed from the service by Mumbai Police Commissioner under Article 311(2)(b) of the Constitution without a departmental enquiry.

Key Points

- **Article 311:**
 - **Article 311 (1)** says that **no government employee** either of an **all India service** or a **state government** shall be dismissed or **removed by an authority subordinate to the own** that appointed him/her.
 - **Article 311 (2)** says that **no civil servant shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry** in which s/he has been informed of the charges and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.
 - **People Protected under Article 311: The members of**
 - Civil service of the Union,
 - All India Service, and
 - Civil service of any State,
 - People who hold a civil post under the Union or any State.
 - The protective safeguards given under Article 311 are **applicable only to civil servants, i.e. public officers**. They are **not available to defence personnel**.
 - **Exceptions to Article 311 (2):**
 - **2 (a)** - 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 (b)** - 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
 - **2 (c)** - 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.
- **Other Recent Case Related to Use of Article 311(2) Subsections:**
 - Recently, the **Jammu & Kashmir** administration set up a **Special Task Force (STF)** to **scrutinise cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under Article 311(2)(c)**.
 - **Three government employees, including two teachers**, were fired using the Article.

- **Options to Dismissed Employee:**
 - The government employee dismissed under these provisions can approach either tribunals like the **state administrative tribunal** or **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)** or the **courts**.
- **Other Related Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Part XIV** of the Constitution of India deals with Services under The Union and The State.
 - **Article 309** empowers the Parliament and the State legislature to **regulate the recruitment, and conditions of service of persons appointed**, to public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of any State respectively.
 - According to **Article 310**, except for the provisions provided by the Constitution, a civil servant of the Union works at the pleasure of the President and a civil servant under a State works at the pleasure of the Governor of that State (**English doctrine of Pleasure**).
 - But this **power of the Government is not absolute**.
 - **Article 311** puts **certain restrictions** on the absolute power of the President or Governor for dismissal, removal or reduction in rank of an officer.

3. MoU between Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Qatar Financial Centre Authority (QFCA)

- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of MoU between Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Qatar Financial Centre Authority (QFCA).

Key takeaways

- The MoU would enhance cooperation between the Institutes to work together to strengthen the Accounting profession and entrepreneurship base in Qatar.
- ICAI has an active Chapter in Doha, Qatar which was established in the year 1981 and is the oldest among the 36 overseas Chapters of the ICAI.
- Qatar (Doha) Chapter is amongst the most vibrant Chapters of ICAI.

Important value additions

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)

- It is a statutory body established under The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949'.
- **Objective:** To regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.

4. India-China: Lessons from Ladakh Stand-off

Context: After over a year, the stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh shows no signs of resolution. Disengagement has stalled, China continues to reinforce its troops, and talks have been fruitless.

Implications of the border tensions

- More broadly, the India-China bilateral relationship has ruptured. India has made clear that the relationship is conditional on peace on the border.
- Political relations are marked by hostility and distrust.
- Reversing a long-held policy, India will no longer overlook the problematic border dispute for the sake of a potentially lucrative wider relationship;
- Even if disengagement continues, the relationship will remain vulnerable to destabilising disruptions.

Key Lessons to be learnt

1. China is more likely to be deterred or coerced with the threat of political costs, rather than material costs.
 - China's defence budget is three to four times larger than India's, and its Western Theatre Command boasts over 200,000 soldiers. The material burden of the crisis would not disrupt its existing priorities.
 - In contrast, India successfully raised the risks of the crisis for China through its threat of a political rupture, not military punishment
2. **Indian Ocean Region is the key**
 - India should consider accepting more risk on the LAC in exchange for long-term leverage and influence in the Indian Ocean Region.
 - At the land border, the difficult terrain and even balance of military force means that each side could only squeeze out modest gains at best.
 - In contrast, India has traditionally been the dominant power in the Indian Ocean Region and stands to lose significant political influence and security if it fails to answer the rapid expansion of Chinese military power in the region.
 - The Ladakh crisis, by prompting an increased militarisation of the LAC, should not defer long-overdue military modernisation and maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

5.Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2021-22 Series

Why in News

The Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has decided to issue Sovereign Gold Bonds in six tranches from May 2021 to September 2021.

Key Points

- **Launch:** The Sovereign Gold Bond (SGB) scheme was **launched in November 2015** with an **objective** to reduce the demand for physical gold and shift a part of the domestic savings - used for the purchase of gold - into financial savings.
- **Issuance:** The Gold Bonds are issued as Government of India Stock under the **Government Securities (GS) Act, 2006**.
 - These are **issued by the RBI on behalf of the Government of India**.
 - Bonds are **sold through** Commercial banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices and recognised stock exchanges viz., **National Stock Exchange of India Limited** and **Bombay Stock Exchange, either directly or through agents**.
- **Eligibility:** The bonds are restricted for sale to **resident individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), trusts, universities and charitable institutions**.
- **Features:**
 - **Issue Price:** Gold bond prices are linked to the price of gold of 999 purity (24 carats) **published by India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA), Mumbai**.
 - **Investment Limit:** Gold bonds can be **purchased in the multiples of one unit**, up to certain thresholds for different investors.
 - The **upper limit** for retail (individual) investors and HUFs is 4 kilograms (4,000 units) each per financial year. For trusts and similar entities, an upper limit of 20 kilograms per financial year is applicable.
 - **Minimum permissible investment is 1 gram of gold**.
 - **Term:** The gold bonds come with a **maturity period of eight years, with an option to exit the investment after the first five years**.
 - **Interest Rate:** A fixed rate of **2.5% per annum** is applicable on the scheme, payable **semi-annually**.

- The interest on Gold Bonds shall be taxable as per the provision of Income Tax Act, 1961.
- **Benefit:**
 - Bonds can be used as **collateral for loans**.
 - The **capital gains tax** arising on redemption of SGB to an **individual** has been **exempted**.
 - Redemption is the act of an issuer repurchasing a bond at or before maturity.
 - Capital gain is the profit earned on the sale of an asset like stocks, bonds or real estate. It results in when the selling price of an asset exceeds its purchase price.
- **Disadvantages of Investing in SGB:**
 - This is a **long term investment unlike physical gold which can be sold immediately**.
 - Sovereign gold bonds are **listed on exchange but the trading volumes are not high**, therefore it will be difficult to exit before maturity.

6. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture

Why in News

The **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** has provided an enhanced allocation of **Rs. 2250 Crore** for the year **2021-22** for 'Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture' (MIDH).

- **Horticulture** is the branch of plant agriculture **dealing with garden crops, generally fruits, vegetables, and ornamental plants**. **M.H. Marigowda** is considered the **Father of Indian Horticulture**.

Key Points

- **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):**
 - **About:** MIDH is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector **covering** fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.
 - **Nodal Ministry:** The **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** is implementing MIDH **with effect from 2014-15**.
 - MIDH is implemented **under Green Revolution - Krishonnati Yojana**.
 - **Funding Pattern:** Under MIDH, **Government of India (GoI)** contributes **60% of total outlay** for developmental programmes **in all the states** except states in North East and Himalayas, **40% share** is contributed by **State Governments**.

- In the case of North Eastern States and Himalayan States, GoI contributes 90%.
- **MIDH Sub-Schemes:**
 - **National Horticulture Mission (NHM):**
 - It is being implemented by **State Horticulture Missions (SHM)** in selected districts of **18 States and 6 Union Territories**.
 - **Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH):**
 - HMNEH is being implemented for overall **development of Horticulture in North East and Himalayan states**.
 - **National Horticulture Board (NHB):**
 - NHB is **implementing various schemes under MIDH in all States and UTs**.
 - **Coconut Development Board (CDB):**
 - CDB is **implementing various schemes under MIDH in all Coconut growing states** in the country.
 - **Central Institute for Horticulture (CIH)**
 - CIH was **established at Medi Zip Hima, Nagaland in 2006-07** for providing technical backstopping through **capacity building and training of farmers** and Field functionaries in the North Eastern Region.
- **Achievements of MIDH:**
 - During the year **2019-20**, the country recorded its **highest ever horticulture production of 320.77 million tonnes**.
 - MIDH has played a significant role in **increasing the area under horticulture crops**.
 - Area and production during the years 2014-15 to 2019-20 has increased by 9% and 14% respectively.
 - It has contributed significantly towards **improving the quality of produce and productivity of farmland**.
 - The initiative of MIDH has not only resulted in **India's self-sufficiency** in the horticulture sector but also contributed towards achieving **sustainable development goals of zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, no poverty, gender equality** etc.
- **Challenges:**
 - The Horticulture sector is still facing a lot of challenges in terms of **high post-harvest loss and gaps in post-harvest management and supply chain infrastructure**.

Way Forward

- There is **tremendous scope for enhancing the productivity of Indian horticulture** which is imperative to cater to the **country's estimated demand of 650 Million MT of fruits and vegetables by the year 2050.**
- Some of the new initiatives like focus on planting material production, cluster development programme, credit push through **Agri Infra Fund**, formation and promotion of **FPOs (Farmers Producer Organisations)** are the right steps in this direction.

7. Rural Imperative in the wake of COVID crisis

Context: The main kharif planting season will begin only from mid-June with the arrival of the monsoon rains.

Agricultural Sector in 2020-21

- The year 2020-21 was exceptional, where the farm sector expanded by 3%, even as the Indian economy as a whole contracted by 6.5%.
- Agricultural exports also grew 17.5%, despite the value of the country's overall merchandise shipments falling by 7.2%.
- Industries like tractor, FMCG and cement companies rode high on rural demand in 2020-21.
- The end result was that rural India provided a cushion for the economy, which suffered its worst recession since Independence and the first after 1979-80.

Reasons for above scenario

- **Low impact of Pandemic:** Covid-19 cases being very low in rural areas last year and the government exempting agricultural activities from lockdown restrictions
- **Favourable Monsoon:** Another reason was excellent rains and favourable winter temperatures that helped farmers harvest a bumper crop.
- **Favourable Prices:** There was also a spike in global agri-commodity prices from around October, the benefits of which were reaped by soyabean, mustard, groundnut, cotton, arhar, urad and chana growers.
- **Right interventions by government:** Firstly, government undertook massive procurement of wheat, paddy, mustard and rabi pulses that were marketed post the lockdown. The second was the record 389.37 crore person-days of employment that got generated under MGNREGA during 2020-21. Along with these two, there was Rs 6,000-per-farmer cash transfer under PM-Kisan that ensured sizeable liquidity infusion into the rural economy.

What will be the scenario this year?

- The Indian Meteorological Department has forecast a normal southwest monsoon, while FAO's world food price index hit an 83-month-high in April. On both these fronts – rainfall and prices – the outlook for agriculture, thus, remains favourable.
- The availability of cushion, provided by agricultural sector last year, is in doubt today, with the second wave of the pandemic not sparing rural areas
- This year, there is not much requirement for MSP procurement, barring in wheat.
- The scope of MGNREGA works is also limited when Covid has made deep inroads into rural areas.

Conclusion

- If the current wave subsides by planting season of Kharif, things shouldn't turn out too bad.
- The focus of government should be more on cash transfers. There's no better time to put to use the JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) infrastructure than now.

Prelims Practice Questions

1) MalaiMahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary is located in which of the following states?

- a. Karnataka
- b. Tamil Nadu
- c. Madhya Pradesh
- d. Maharashtra

Answer : a

Explanation:

- **MalaiMahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary** would be soon announced as a tiger reserve.
- The approval from the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** is expected any time now.
- Once notified, Chamarajanagar district will have the rare distinction in the country of harbouring three tiger reserves.
- Also, with this, Karnataka will have six tiger reserves, the others being Nagarahole, Bhadra, and Anshi-Dandeli, apart from Bandipur and BRT Tiger Reserves.

2) General Education Rejuvenation Mission is an initiative of which of the following states?

- a. Kerala
- b. Gujarat
- c. Tamil Nadu
- d. Andhra Pradesh

Answer : a

Explanation:

- **Kerala** will become the **first State to totally digitise the general education sector** in March in the wake of the **General Education Rejuvenation Mission**, Nava Kerala Mission coordinator has recently said.
- Classrooms in State schools are going high-tech. As many as 44,705 classrooms from Classes 8 to 12 in 4,752 schools have been provided with laptop, multimedia projector, DSLR camera, speaker, television, and so on. An amount of Rs. 1 lakh is

being spent on each smart classroom. Classrooms for Classes 1 to 7 in 9,941 schools would become high-tech soon, a statement from Mr. Philip said.

3) “A Future for the World’s Children Report” was recently published by?

- a. UNICEF
- b. The Lancet
- c. World Health Organization
- d. All of the above

Answer : d

Explanation:

- Predatory marketing of junk food, sugary beverages, alcohol and tobacco products preys on children and must be regulated, said **A Future for the World’s Children report** by a commission of 40 global child and adolescent health experts by the **World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and The Lancet**.
- No single country is adequately protecting children’s health, their environment and their futures.
- Among 180 countries surveyed, India ranks 131 (**Flourishing Index**), mainly because of high infant mortality and poor child health.
- The ranking is based on the ability of a child to survive and thrive, and includes performances on health, education, and nutrition; sustainability, with a proxy for greenhouse gas emissions, and equity, or income gaps, among others.
- India ranked 77th on sustainability index that takes into account per capita carbon emissions and ability of children in a nation to live healthy lives.

4) National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) is a Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) under which of the following ministries?

- a. Ministry of Mines
- b. Ministry of Earth Sciences
- c. Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers
- d. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Answer: a

Explanation:

- National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) is a Navratna CPSE under the Ministry of Mines, Govt. of India, with its headquarters at Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- The Company is one of the largest integrated Bauxite-Alumina-Aluminium-Power Complex in Asia.

- The company is listed on Bombay Stock Exchange and National Stock Exchange.
- The Alumina Refinery provides alumina to the company's smelter at Angul and exports the balance alumina to overseas markets through Visakhapatnam Port.

5) Consider the following pairs Places in News - Countries

- 1. Damascus - Turkey**
- 2. Fessenheim - Italy**

Which of the pair(s) given above is/are correctly matched?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Israel has claimed to struck bases of the Islamic Jihad militant group near the **SyriancapitalDamascus**.
- Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria, mainly targeting government forces as well as allied Iranian forces and Hezbollah fighters.
- However, it is rare for them to claim such strikes directly.
- **France** has recently begun shutting down its oldest nuclear power plant after 43 years in operation.
- It had disconnected one of two reactors at **Fessenheim**, along the Rhine River near France's eastern border with Germany and Switzerland.

6) Consider the following pairs with respect to India's exercises

Exercises - Countries

- 1. Sampriti - Nepal**
- 2. Indradhanush - Russia**

Which of the pair(s) given above is/are incorrectly matched?

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

Answer : c

Explanation:

- Sampriti - Bangladesh
- Indradhanush - U.K



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. What do you understand by scheduled tribes? Examine the dilemma related to the development of the tribes in India. (250 words)

Approach

- Explain the term 'scheduled tribes' and 'tribals general characteristics' in India.
- List out some challenges faced while developing tribals in India in dilemmatic form.
- Give some suggestive steps to come out of such a dilemma.

2Q. Globalisation refers to the growing interdependence between different peoples, regions and countries in the world. Explain. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly highlight what globalisation is and its nature in different times.
- Highlight how interdependence among people, nations has led to globalisation.
- Highlight how globalisation has led to interdependence among people, nations.