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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Reforming medical education

Context:

In the backdrop of Covid-19 pandemic, the numerous challenges being faced by India's health systems have become apparent.

Issues:

- There is a **serious shortage of health workers**, especially doctors, **particularly in some northern States**.
- The workforce crisis has been **aggravated by the imbalances within the**
 - The doctor-population ratio in northern States is far short of the required norm, while the southern States, barring Telangana, have enough doctors in possession.
 - There is also a general **lack of adequate staffing in rural areas**.
- If urgent action is not taken, the shortage will amplify leading to the **weakening of health systems**.
- Health workers are critical also for the **preparedness of health systems in preventing, detecting and responding to threats posed by diseases**.
- Shortage is a major impediment for achieving the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Analysing NITI Aayog's proposal:

- The NITI Aayog's has proposed allowing private entities to take over **district hospitals for converting them into teaching hospitals** with at least 150 MBBS seats.
- There are some **concerns associated with this proposal**.
- This would **encourage private sector in medical education directly aiding the corporatisation processes of healthcare provisioning** while the under-resourced public health system will be a collateral damage.
- The **corporatisation will make the services of district hospitals very costly**.
- Even from the perspective of producing more doctors to meet the shortages in under-served areas, this is unlikely to yield the desired result.
- This proposal is **not aligned with India's national health policy goals** like achieving universal health care and health equity. It could widen health inequalities further.

Way Forward:

- In order to effectively address these challenges, our **health systems must be strengthened.**
- One of the critical building blocks of the health system is **human resources.**
- Solving the shortage, needs **long-term thinking and commitment from the political leadership.**
 - The government should **learn from previous cases of public-private partnerships (PPPs).**
 - In the past, many PPPs had to be shelved owing to the non-compliance of the agreement conditions by the private sector under which they were also supposed to cater to the non-paying patients.
- In order to meet the significant shortfall of qualified doctors in northern States, **scaling up of medical education is warranted.**
- By establishing new medical colleges, the government can increase student intake as well as enhance equitable access to medical education.
- The government must **allocate adequate financial resources** to strengthen the overall capacity of existing medical colleges to enrich student learning and improve output.

Conclusion:

A regulated market with medical colleges that are publicly funded but privately operated cannot be a feasible solution to the health workforce crisis. **Medical education is a public good as its purpose is to improve the population health and decrease disease burden.** The pandemic has provided an opportunity for this. There should be a **substantial step-up in public investment in medical education.**

2. Assam NRC authority seeks reverification of citizens' list

Context:

The Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC) authority has approached the Supreme Court seeking a **comprehensive and time-bound re-verification of the citizens' list**, highlighting major irregularities in the process.

Background:

- The notification for starting the **Supreme Court-monitored exercise to update the 1951 NRC in Assam** was issued in December 2013.
- **The final draft published in August 2019 had excluded 19.06 lakh** out of 3.3 crore applications for lack of adequate documents establishing them as Indian citizens.

- People left out of the draft NRC are required to **approach the nearest Foreigners' Tribunal** within 120 days of receiving a rejection slip for weighing their citizenship claims.

Details:

- The interlocutory application by the State NRC Coordinator also prays for **the deletion of illegal voters from Assam's electoral rolls** besides the **revision of the draft NRC** and a **supplementary list under a relevant clause of the Schedule of Citizenship** (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
- The final NRC is yet to be published by the Registrar General of India.

3. Relax FCRA norms, ease relief flow, says Nasscom

Context:

Infotech industry association Nasscom has urged the Prime Minister to **temporarily relax stringent Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) norms** so as to **ease the flow of overseas COVID-19 relief into the country** and grant **emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines** in view of domestic vaccine shortages.

Details:

- An NGO has now moved the Delhi High Court seeking exemption from the Union Home Ministry's March 31 deadline to open an FCRA account with the SBI branch in New Delhi.
- The petitioner argued that it applied to open the account before the March 31 deadline but the **administrative delays on the part of the bank and the Ministry severely restricted its activities** including providing COVID-19 relief and paying of urgent salaries of staff and also affected its charitable and educational activities.
- Many NGOs are affected by **the new regulations as they are hampering charitable work** during the pandemic.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment, 2020:

- Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020 was passed in the Parliament in September 2020.
- The Home Ministry had directed all NGOs seeking foreign donations to **open a designated FCRA account at the State Bank of India's New Delhi branch by March 31, 2021.**

- The NGOs registered under FCRA shall not receive any foreign donations in any other bank account from April 1, 2021.

Note:

- An FCRA registration is mandatory for NGOs to receive foreign funds.

Way Forward:

- The pandemic has underscored **the importance of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (the whole earth is one family) as a framework for India's global engagement.
- Thousands of NGOs **serve extremely disadvantaged sections**, at times filling in for the state, at others, supplementing it.
- Further **relaxations are necessary in terms of opening an FCRA account with the SBI branch in New Delhi.**
- For a global community to function, there is a **need for a seamless sharing of ideas and resources across national boundaries.**
- It should not be discouraged unless there is reason to believe the funds are being used to aid illegal activities.

4. Maratha quota: govt. files petition

Context:

The **central government has filed a review petition** in the Supreme Court **challenging** a majority view of its Constitution Bench that **only the Centre has the power under the 102nd Constitution Amendment to identify and list Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) and not States.**

Details:

- The Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, found there were **no "exceptional circumstances" or "extraordinary situation" in Maharashtra**, which required the State government **to break the 50% ceiling limit** to bestow quota benefits on the Maratha community.
- All five judges agreed that the **Marathas are a dominant forward class** and are **in the mainstream of national life.** The above situation is not extraordinary.
- The SC **struck down the findings of the Justice M.G. Gaikwad Commission**, which led to the enactment of the **Maratha quota law**, and set aside the Bombay High Court judgment which validated the **Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018.**

State Government's Argument:

- The state government's argument was that **since the population of the backward class is 85% and the reservation limit is only 50%**, an increase in reservation limit would qualify as an **extraordinary circumstance**.
- **All five judges disagreed with this argument.**

Supreme Court Verdict:

- The High Court, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment.
 - The Supreme Court concluded that even the **reduced percentages were ultra vires**.
- The Supreme Court held that a separate reservation for the Maratha community **violated Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law)**.
- "The ceiling of 50% with the 'extraordinary circumstances' exception, is the just balance – what is termed as the '**Goldilocks solution**' – i.e. the **solution containing the right balance that allows the State sufficient latitude to ensure meaningful affirmative action to those who deserve it and at the same time ensures that the essential content of equality,**" Justice S. Ravindra Bhat on the Bench agreed.

Revisiting 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment:

- The Supreme Court **declined to revisit its 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment**, which fixed the reservation limit at 50%.
- The Indira Sawhney judgment had categorically said "**50% shall be the rule**, only in certain **exceptional and extraordinary situations** for bringing far-flung and remote area population into mainstream, **50% rule can be relaxed.**"
- The court said that the **50% ceiling, although an arbitrary determination by the court in 1992, is now constitutionally recognised.**

On 102nd Constitutional Amendment:

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Second Amendment) Act, 2018 gives **constitutional status to the National Backward Classes Commission**. The Amendment also **gives the President powers to notify backward classes**.
- Several states raised questions on the interpretation of the Amendment and argued that it curtails their powers.
- The **Bench unanimously upheld the constitutional validity** of the 102nd Amendment.

- The Court has ruled that, henceforth, **there will only be a single list of socially and educationally backward classes** with respect to each State and Union Territory notified by the President of India.
- The Supreme Court held that “**the final say in regard to inclusion or exclusion (or modification of lists) of socially and economically backward classes (SEBCs) is firstly with the President under Article 342A (1), and thereafter, in case of modification or exclusion from the lists initially published, with the Parliament**”.
- In the task of **identification of SEBCs**, the President shall be guided by the **Commission set up under Article 338B**; its advice shall also be sought by the state in regard to policies that might be framed by it.
- The **Centre alone is empowered to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC)** and include them in the Central List for claiming reservation benefits.
- While the **identification of SEBCs will be done centrally, state governments retain the power to determine the extent of reservation** and make specific policy in the spirit of “cooperative federalism”.
- The **President’s prerogative** as regards the identification and inclusion of SEBCs in the List **would not affect the States’ power to make reservations in favour of particular communities or castes, the quantum of reservations, the nature of benefits and the kind of reservations**, and all other matters falling within the ambit of **Articles 15 and 16**.

5. App to view SC proceedings launched

What’s in News?

A mobile app that would allow media persons to view the Supreme Court’s virtual proceedings live on their mobile phones has been launched.

Details:

- The CJI said **public access to court hearings was important** as the rulings of courts, more particularly the Supreme Court, **had an impact on the lives of people across the country**.
- It was highlighted that the role of the media assumes importance in the process of disseminating information.
- The CJI also launched a new feature in the Supreme Court’s official website called ‘**Indicative Notes**’.
 - It is aimed at providing concise summaries of landmark judgments in an easy-to-understand format.
 - It would serve as a useful resource for media persons and the general public who wish to be better informed about the rulings of the court.

- It is widely opined that access to media to court proceedings would increase transparency.

6. The crime of enforced disappearances must end

Context:

Enforced disappearances are becoming a **major concern** in Asia. Cases especially in Asia are not decreasing, with **domestic criminal law systems insufficient to deal with this atrocity**.

Enforced Disappearances:

- **Enforced disappearance** occurs when a person is secretly abducted or imprisoned by a state or political organization, or by a third party with the authorization, support, of a state or political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the person's fate and whereabouts, with the intent of placing the victim outside the protection of law.
- Enforced disappearances became widely known to the world in the 1970s and the early 1980s during the **'Dirty War' in Argentina**.
- The Argentine military dictatorship **committed the forceful disappearances of some 30,000 of its own citizens** while denying that they kidnapped, tortured, and murdered them.

An enforced disappearance is defined by several constituent elements.

- It is characterised by the **deprivation of liberty**.
- There are **grounds for seeking governmental responsibility for the act**, including of officials of different branches or levels of government or by organised groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of, the government.
- Such an act typically occurs in the **context of a state's continuous refusal to take relevant action**, including refusal to disclose the fate or whereabouts of the persons concerned or refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law.

United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID):

- To fight against these gross and systematic human rights violations, the UN Commission on Human Rights established the Working Group in **1980 as the first special procedure mechanism of the UN Commission on Human Rights**.

Myanmar Coup:

- In February 1, 2021, the **military launched a coup d'état to overthrow the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi's party**, the National League for Democracy.
- The **military is committed to suppressing the people's movement**, and the police are carrying out unimaginable acts of violence and oppression against those demanding freedom of expression and the restoration of democracy.
- The democracy movement in Myanmar is at a critical juncture.

Issue:

- Since the coup, the **United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)** has received reports of enforced disappearances.
- There is concern that there will be a plethora of cases of enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, and even murder if the situation continues to deteriorate.
- Besides Myanmar, in many parts of Asia, enforced disappearances are being used as a tool to suppress the people.

Concerns around minorities:

China:

- In China, under the pretext of re-education to prevent terrorism, **Uyghur minority ethnic** group members are **forcibly sent to** what Chinese authorities call '**vocational education and training centers**', with no information on their whereabouts.
- '**Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL)**' under Article 73 of the amended Criminal Procedure Law, **is used against individuals accused of endangering state security**.
 - RSDL places individuals under **incommunicado detention** without disclosing their location. This may amount to a form of enforced disappearance.

Pakistan and Bangladesh:

- Increasing numbers of enforced disappearances are being reported in Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- Enforced disappearances are being committed in the name of **counter-terrorism measures**.

Post-conflict issues in Sri Lanka:

- Sri Lanka has experienced more than **three decades of domestic conflict** accompanied by various forms of **enforced disappearances**.
- Recently, the government has weakened the initiatives it previously started to investigate enforced disappearances.
 - Instead, it has now returned to **promoting a culture of impunity for these crimes**.

During the Pandemic:

- Not only have enforced disappearances continued during the pandemic, but it has generated new contexts for enforced disappearances and has reduced the capacity of all actors to take the necessary action to search for and investigate cases of disappeared persons.

Remedial measures:

- Under the **Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance** (1992), the Working Group works to assist families of disappeared persons to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared.
- With the assistance of the secretariat members based in Geneva, **the Working Group monitors states' compliance, and documented cases of enforced disappearance**.
- The **Working Group receives individual petitions** from victims' families and civil society members, and channels them through to the relevant governments to demand searches.
- The WGEID also presses states to offer remedies, including compensation and a guarantee of non-recurrence of the violations.

Ratifying the Convention:

- To protect the right to be free from enforced disappearances, the international community adopted the **International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 2006**.
 - This became effective in 2010.
- The number of participating states is still very low compared to other treaties.
- Among 63 member states of the treaty, only eight states from the Asia-Pacific region have ratified or acceded to the treaty.
- Only four East Asian states – Cambodia, Japan, Mongolia, and Sri Lanka have ratified it.

Conclusion:

- Enforced disappearance is a serious crime that goes against the philosophy of humanity.
- The pain and suffering of the family members do not end until they find out the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones.
- Asian countries should consider their obligations and responsibilities more seriously and **reject a culture of impunity in order to eradicate enforced disappearances.**
- The **domestic criminal law systems are not sufficient** to deal with the crime of enforced disappearance. It is a continuous crime that **needs a comprehensive approach** to fight against it.
- The international community must **strengthen its efforts to eradicate enforced disappearances at the earliest.**

7. India still resists community spread tag

What's in News?

As per the latest **report by the World Health Organization**, in spite of adding the highest number of COVID-19 infections to the global caseload every day, India continues to label itself as a country with **no community transmission (CT)**.

- India has opted for the lower, less serious classification called **cluster of cases**.
- Countries such as the United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, France have all labelled themselves as being in community transmission.
- CT happens when **new cases in the last 14 days cannot be traced to those who have an international travel history**, when cases cannot be linked to a specific cluster.

8. Israel-Palestine fighting escalates

Context:

Tensions in East Jerusalem have triggered the heaviest **Israel-Palestine fighting** in years. Israel faced an escalating conflict on two fronts trying to quell riots between Arabs and Jews.

What led to escalation?

- Tensions have been building up since April 2021 when the **Israeli police set up barricades** at the Damascus Gate outside the occupied Old City, **preventing Palestinians from gathering there.**
- The **threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem** neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah **escalated the crisis further.**

Sheikh Jarrah dispute:

- **Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced out of their homes when the State of Israel was created in historic Palestine in 1948** (the Palestinians call the events 'Nakba', or catastrophe).
 - **Twenty-eight of those Palestinian families moved to Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem to settle there.**
- **In 1956, when East Jerusalem was ruled by Jordan, the Jordanian Ministry of Construction and Development and the UN Relief and Works Agency facilitated the construction of houses for these families in Sheikh Jarrah.**
 - **But Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967.**
 - **By the early 1970s, Jewish agencies started demanding the families leave the land.**
 - **Jewish committees claimed that the houses sat on land they purchased in 1885** (when Jews, facing persecution in Europe, were migrating to historic Palestine that was part of the Ottoman Empire).
 - **In 2021, the Central Court in East Jerusalem upheld a decision to evict four Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in favour of Jewish settlers. The Israeli Supreme Court is yet to hear the case. The issue remains unresolved.**

Why Jerusalem?

- **Jerusalem has been at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**
- **According to the original 1947 UN Partition Plan, Jerusalem was proposed to be an international city.**
 - **But in the first Arab Israel war of 1948, the Israelis captured the western half of the city, and Jordan took the eastern part, including the Old City that houses Haram esh-Sharif.**
 - **Al-Aqsa Mosque (Islam's third holiest site) and the Dome of the Rock are situated within Haram esh-Sharif.**
 - **One side of the compound, called Temple Mount by the Jews, is the Wailing Wall (Western Wall), which is believed to be the remains of the Second Jewish Temple, the holiest site in Judaism.**
- **Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it later.**
- **Since its annexation, Israel has expanded settlements in East Jerusalem. It is now home to some 220,000 Jews.**
 - **Jews born in East Jerusalem are Israeli citizens.**
 - **Palestinians in the city are given conditional residency permits.**
- **Palestinians in East Jerusalem, unlike other parts of the occupied West Bank, can apply for Israeli citizenship. Very few Palestinians have done so.**
- **Israel sees the whole city as its "unified, eternal capital".**

- This **claim was endorsed by Donald Trump** when he was U.S. President but **not recognised by most other countries**.
- Palestinian leaders across the political spectrum have maintained that they would **not accept any compromise formula for a future Palestinian state unless East Jerusalem is its capital**.

What Next?

- In a further sign of rising tensions, Israel signalled it is **widening its military campaign**.
- The military said it is sending **troop reinforcements to the Gaza border** and the Defence Minister ordered the mobilisation of 5,000 reserve soldiers.
- But, in a potentially positive sign, Egyptian and Palestinian officials said **Egypt was working on brokering a cease-fire**.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

9. Centre's SC affidavit jars with TRIPS stand

Issue:

Public health advocates and intellectual property rights experts point to a **contradiction in India's global push for the suspension of intellectual property protection, with its stand in the Supreme Court** that bringing COVID-19 vaccines under a statutory regime will be counter-productive at this stage.

Background:

- India, along with South Africa, had **initiated a proposal for the temporary waiver of certain provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)** to facilitate fair, affordable and universal access to COVID vaccines and medicines, especially for developing countries.

Details:

- The two countries had highlighted that some **WTO members had carried out urgent legal amendments** to their national patent laws **to expedite the process of issuing compulsory/ government use licences**.

- However, experts point to an **affidavit filed by the Centre in the SC**, which shows the **government taking a different stand** in favour of the protection of intellectual property rights.
 - “**Any exercise of statutory powers** either under the Patents Act, 1970 read with TRIPS Agreement and Doha Declaration or in any other way can **only prove to be counter-productive at this stage**,” the Centre said.
- This was in response to the order of the SC which had flagged the legal framework within which the Centre could “**possibly consider compulsory licensing and government acquisition of patents**”.

10. India received USD 83 billion in remittances in 2020: World Bank report

According to a World Bank report, India received over **USD 83 billion in remittances in 2020**, a drop of just **0.2 per cent from the previous year**, despite a pandemic which devastated the world economy.

- Officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries reached USD540 billion in 2020.

Highlights of the Report:

- In 2019, **India had received USD 83.3 billion in remittances**. India's remittances fell by just 0.2 per cent in 2020, with much of the decline due to a 17 per cent drop in remittances from the United Arab Emirates, which offset resilient flows from the United States and other host countries.
- **China received USD 59.5 billion** in remittances in 2020 against USD 68.3 billion the previous year, is a distant second in terms of global remittances.
- India and China are followed by **Mexico (USD42.8 billion)**, the Philippines (USD34.9 billion), Egypt (USD29.6 billion), Pakistan (USD26 billion), France (USD24.4 billion) and Bangladesh (USD21 billion).
- In **Pakistan, remittances rose by about 17 per cent**, with the biggest growth coming from Saudi Arabia, followed by the European Union countries and the United Arab Emirates.
- In Bangladesh, remittances also showed a brisk uptick in 2020 (18.4 per cent), and Sri Lanka witnessed remittance growth of 5.8 per cent.
- In contrast, **remittances to Nepal fell by about two per cent**.

What is Remittance?

- When **migrants send home part of their earnings in the form of either cash or goods to support their families**, these transfers are known as workers' or **migrant remittances**.
- Remittances are typically **transfers from one person to another person or household**.
- Worldwide, officially recorded international migrant remittances are projected to reach **\$596 billion in 2017**, with \$450 billion flowing to developing economies.
- A typical remittance transaction takes place in three steps:
 - The migrant sender pays the remittance to the sending agent using cash, check, money order, credit card, debit card, or a debit instruction sent by e-mail, phone, or through the Internet.
 - The sending agency instructs its agent in the recipient's country to deliver the remittance.
 - The paying agent makes the payment to the beneficiary.
- For settlement between agents, in most cases, **there is no real-time funds transfer**; the balance owed by the sending agent to the paying agent is settled periodically through a commercial bank.
 - Informal remittances are sometimes settled through goods trade.
- The costs of a remittance transaction include **a fee charged by the sending agent**, typically paid by the sender, and a currency-conversion fee for delivery of local currency to the beneficiary in another country.
- Remittance flows tend to be **more stable than capital flows**, and they tend to be countercyclical – increasing during economic downturns or after a natural disaster when private capital flows tend to decrease.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1) 1st BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting

The 1st BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting held on 11-12 May 2021 in Sushma Swaraj Bhawan, New Delhi in virtual format.

Highlights of the meeting:

- India has assumed **BRICS Presidency this year**.
- Prime agenda for the discussions were:
- Promoting Social Security Agreements amongst BRICS Nations
- Formalization of labour markets
- Participation of women in labour force and Gig and platform workers – Role in labour market.

BRICS:

- BRICS is an **informal group of states** comprising of:
 - Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa.
 - **South Africa** joined this informal group in 2011 and BRIC became BRICS.
- It was established through the **Russian initiative on 16 June 2009**.
 - The first formal summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- It together represents **about 42% of the world population, 23% of GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade**.
- The acronym **BRIC** was first used in 2001 by **Goldman Sachs** in their Global Economics Paper.
- The BRICS members are **all developing or newly industrialised countries**.
- All five BRICS nations are **G-20 members**.
- At the **Fortaleza Summit (2014)**, in Brazil, important institutions were created: **The New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)**.
- At the 11th BRICS Summit held in Brasilia, the **Brasilia Declaration** was signed.
 - It advocated Strengthening the multilateral system, Economic and Financial Cooperation and cooperation on the fight against

transnational crime, especially against organized crime & money laundering.

Goals:

- To **promote dialogue and cooperation** among our countries in an **incremental, proactive, pragmatic, open and transparent way**.
- To **serve common interests** of emerging market economies and developing countries.
- To build a harmonious world of **lasting peace and common prosperity**.

BRICS comprises:

- 41 % of the world's population,
- 24 % of the global GDP and
- 17 % of the share in world trade.

2) Mumbai cop dismissed without department probe

Suspended police officer Sachin Waze, arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in connection with the Mukesh Ambani terror scare case, was **dismissed from service by Mumbai Police Commissioner under Article 311 (2) (b) without a departmental enquiry**.

- Waze was arrested by the NIA in March in connection with his role in the **Ambani terror scare case** and subsequent murder of Mansukh Hiran.

What is Article 311?

- The procedure laid down in Article 311 is intended to assure:
 1. A measure of **security of tenure to Government servants**, who are covered by the Article and s
 2. To provide certain **safeguards against arbitrary dismissal** or removal of a Government servant or reduction to a lower rank.
- This Article says that:
 - **No person who is a member of a civil service of the Union or an all-India service or a civil service of a State or holds a civil post under the Union or a State shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.**

- No such person as aforesaid shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank **except after an inquiry** in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.
- The above mentioned provisions are enforceable in a court of law and if there is an infringement of Article 311, the orders passed by the disciplinary authority will be void.

3) SWAMIH completes its first residential project.

- Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs handed over possession to homebuyers as Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund completes its first residential project.

Key takeaways

- The residential project – Rivali Park, located in suburban Mumbai, was the first housing project in India to have received funding under the SWAMIH Fund.
- The SWAMIH Fund was launched in 2019.
- Rivali Park Wintergreens is the first investment by the Fund and is also the first project to get completed.
- The SWAMIH Investment Fund is one of the largest private equity teams in India and has done commendable work despite COVID-19 related restrictions.
- The Fund is targeting to complete an aggregate of 1,16,600 homes.
- This Fund is bridging the trust deficit between homebuyers and developers by completing construction and delivering homes without depending on any other source of finance.

4) Reforms needed in WHO

Context: Recently, a report released by an independent panel co-chaired by former New Zealand PM Helen Clark linked the severity of the global outbreak to deficiencies across governments, the WHO and other multilateral organisations.

Issues raised by the Panel

1. **Late warning:** In the first weeks of the pandemic, the WHO could have warned countries to assume that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was spreading among people, as a precaution

2. **Late Declaration of Pandemic:** WHO also could have declared the outbreak in Wuhan, China, a public health emergency of international concern – the highest level of global alert – earlier by at least January 22, 2020.
3. **Weak Body:** The WHO should have the power to investigate outbreaks speedily, with guaranteed rights of access and with the ability to publish information without waiting for a member state’s approval (China)
4. **A month of lost opportunity:** Most countries failed to heed the warning, choosing to “wait and see,” rather than take firmer measures that could have contained the virus.
5. **Need for greater role by International Organisations:** WHO and WTO should help broker an agreement among major vaccine-producing countries and manufacturers on voluntary licensing and transferring vaccine technology to third parties.
6. **Need for specialised Council:** The panel also called for the creation of a Global Health Threats Council that will maintain political commitment to pandemic preparedness and response and hold actors accountable
7. **A Pandemic Framework Convention** within six months was recommended by the Panel to address gaps in international regulations, and to clarify responsibilities between states and international organisations
8. **Changes in Financing:** An international pandemic-financing facility is needed that is capable of disbursing \$5 billion to \$10 billion a year for preparedness and \$50 billion to \$100 billion in the event of a crisis
9. The panel also recommended single, seven-year term for the WHO director-general and regional directors.

Conclusion

Covid-19 is the 21st century’s Chernobyl moment – not because a disease outbreak is like a nuclear accident, but because it has shown so clearly the gravity of the threat to our health and well-being.

5) Smokeless Cremation system developed

- Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar has developed a prototype of a moveable electric cremation system which claims to be using first of its kind technology that involves smokeless cremation despite using wood.

Key takeaways

- It uses half of the wood otherwise required for the cremation.
- It is eco-friendly because of the technology that uses the combustion air system.
- It is based on wick-stove technology in which the wick when lighted glows yellow.
- This is converted into smokeless blue flame with the help of combustion air system installed over the wicks.
- The cremation system or incinerator heats up at 1044 degree Celsius which ensures complete sterilization.
- Keeping in view the present pandemic situation, if this system is adopted, it may provide respectable cremation to the near and dear ones of those who cannot afford the financial burden of arranging wood.

6) Indian Researchers sequence pangolin scales

- Indian Researchers have sequenced 624 pangolin scales, thereby categorising the Indian and Chinese pangolins.

Key takeaways

- **Pangolins**, despite being listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 continue to be the world's most trafficked mammal.
- The primary demand for its scales in the making of traditional East Asian medicines has led to an estimated illegal trade worth \$2.5 billion every year.
- To enforce the appropriate national and international laws and to track the decline of the species, researchers of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, have now developed tools to tell apart the scales of Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).
- They characterised the morphological features and investigated genetic variations between the two species by sequencing 624 scales of pangolins and comparing the sequences with all eight pangolin species.
- Based on the size, shape, weight and ridge counts on the scales, the team was able to categorise the two species of Indian and Chinese pangolins.

- Though the Chinese pangolin is distributed mostly in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the north-eastern part of India is also its home.



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding “Bhavai”

1. It is a traditional folk theatre art performed in Kerala
2. Bhavai performers belong to a caste that came to be known as Taragala

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

Explanation:

- Bhavai, also known as Vesha or Swang, is a popular folk theatre form of western India, especially in Gujarat.
- Bhavai is believed to have originated in the 14th century, Asaita Thakar is traditionally credited for its origin.
- Bhavai is partly entertainment and partly a ritual offering made to Goddess Amba.
- It is performed in open spaces in front of the temple.
- Bhavai performers belong to a caste that came to be known as Taragala.

2. The authority that adjourns the Lok Sabha House or suspends the meeting in absence of a quorum is

- A. President of India
- B. Speaker, Lok Sabha
- C. Leader of the House
- D. Secretary, Lok Sabha

Answer : B

Explanation:

Learning: The speaker has the following powers and duties:

He maintains order and decorum in the House for conducting its business and regulating its proceedings. This is his primary responsibility and he has final power in this regard. He is the final interpreter of the provisions of (a) the Constitution of India, (b) the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Lok Sabha, and (c) the parliamentary precedents, within the House. He adjourns the House or suspends the meeting in absence of a quorum. The quorum to constitute a meeting of the House is one-tenth of the total strength of the House.

3. "Pichvai Paintings" is a traditional art form that has its origin in which of these states?

- a. Odisha
- b. Maharashtra
- c. Bihar
- d. Rajasthan

Answer: d

Explanation:

Pichwai paintings also known as “Pichvai” is a traditional Indian art having its origins in Rajasthan. Pichwai art features intricate paintings portraying Lord Krishna (Sreenath Ji) which is done on fabric using dark rich hues.

4. With reference to National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), consider the following statements:

1. It is a government-backed entity established to provide long-term capital to the country’s infrastructure sector.
2. The Indian government has a majority stake in NIIF.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation:

- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is a government-backed entity established to provide long-term capital to the country’s infrastructure sector. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The **Indian government has a minority stake (49%)** in NIIF with the majority (51%) held by foreign and domestic investors. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - With the Centre’s significant stake, NIIF is considered India’s quasi-sovereign wealth fund.
 - It was set up in December 2015 as a Category-II Alternate Investment Fund.

- Across its three funds viz. Master Fund, Fund of Funds, and Strategic Opportunities Fund, it manages over USD 4.3 billion of capital.
- Its registered office is in New Delhi.

5. Which of the following is the nodal agency to implement price stabilization measures under Operation Greens:

- a. Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)
- b. National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED)
- c. Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)
- d. Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare

Answer: b

Explanation:

- NAFED is an agricultural cooperative organisation established with the objective of promoting cooperative marketing of agricultural produce to benefit farmers.
- It was established in 1958 to promote the trade of agricultural products and forest resources.
- With its headquarters in New Delhi, it is today one of the largest procurement as well as marketing agencies for agricultural products in India.
- It is the nodal agency to implement price stabilization measures under Operation Greens.

6) The Bolshevik Party and its revolution was concerned with which country?

- a. France
- b. Russia
- c. Venezuela
- d. Turkey

Answer: b

Explanation:

- In 1917, leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin launched a nearly bloodless coup against the Duma's provisional government and seized power. This is referred to as the October Revolution of Russia or the Bolshevik Revolution.



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Social audits help in bridging the gap between policy objectives and outcomes. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Describe Social audit as introduction.
- Highlight role of Social Audit in bridging gap between objectives stated in policy and desired outcomes.

- Give conclusion.

2Q. 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.

