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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG)

- The government had launched the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG), comprising **10 labs spread across India to ascertain the status of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 in the country.**
- It would monitor the **genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 on a regular basis** through a **multi-laboratory network.**
- It has a **high-level Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee.**
- Also, it has a **Scientific Advisory Group** for scientific and technical guidance.
- The 10 identified laboratories of INSACOG Consortium **report their sequencing results to the Central Surveillance unit of the National Centre for Diseases Control [NCDC]** from where it is shared with the **State Surveillance Units (SSUs) of Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) by the Central Surveillance Unit (CSU).**

2. Restructuring the tribunals system

Background:

- The Centre has abolished several appellate tribunals and authorities and transferred their jurisdiction to other existing judicial bodies through **the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021.**
- The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021 has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

Concerns:

- The Ordinance has met with sharp criticism for the following reasons.

Bypassing the normal legislative process:

- By taking the **ordinance route** the government seems to have bypassed the usual legislative process thus depriving the legislature of its right to discuss and deliberate on the issue.

Impact of the abolishment of tribunals:

- The abolishing of several tribunals such as the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal **without any stakeholder consultation** will have a profound impact on the stakeholders.
- Despite the Supreme Court's direction in **Roger Mathew v. South Indian Bank (2019)**, **no judicial impact assessment** was conducted prior to abolishing the tribunals through this Ordinance.

Against the judicial direction:

- While the Ordinance has incorporated the suggestions made in **Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2020)** on the composition of a search-cum-selection committee and its role in disciplinary proceedings, it has fixed a four-year tenure for Chairpersons and members of tribunals thus blatantly disregarding the court's direction for fixing a five-year term.

Non commission of NTC:

- The Centre is yet to constitute a **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)**, an independent umbrella body to supervise the functioning of tribunals, the appointment of and disciplinary proceedings against members, and to take care of administrative and infrastructural needs of the tribunals.
 - The idea of an NTC was first mooted in **Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997)**.
- The lack of an institutional body like the NTC will fail to deter **executive interference in the functioning of tribunals** in matters of appointment and removal of tribunal members, as well as in the provision of finances, infrastructure, personnel and other resources required for the day-to-day functioning of the tribunals.
- Such a scenario can lead to a situation where the system can be used to serve political or private interests.

Significance of NTC:

- The NTC would ideally take on some duties relating to administration and oversight. A 'corporatised' structure of NTC with a Board, a CEO and a Secretariat will allow it to scale up its services and **provide requisite administrative support to all tribunals across the country**. The NTC could pave the way for the separation of the administrative and judicial functions carried out by various tribunals.
- The NTC functioning as an umbrella authority can support uniform administration across all tribunals.

- The NTC could set performance standards for the efficiency of tribunals and their own administrative processes. This can help **increase efficiency as well as ensure better accountability**.
- It could function as an independent recruitment body to develop and operationalize the procedure for disciplinary proceedings and the appointment of tribunal members. Giving the NTC the authority to set members' salaries, allowances, and other service conditions, subject to regulations, would **help maintain tribunals' independence**.

Recommendations:

- The Finance Ministry which has been vested with the responsibility for tribunals until the NTC is constituted should come up with an appropriate transition plan.
- The way to reform the tribunal system is to look at solutions from a systemic perspective supported by evidence. **Establishing the NTC** will definitely entail a radical restructuring of the present tribunals system.
- Developing an independent oversight body like the NTC requires a **legal framework** that protects its independence and impartiality. The NTC must be established vide a **constitutional amendment or be backed by a statute** that guarantees it functional, operational and financial independence.

3. Fighting resumes in southern Afghanistan

Context:

Fighting between the Taliban and Afghan government forces resumed ending a three-day ceasefire agreed to mark Id-ul-Fitr.

Background:

- President Joe Biden has announced the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by September 11 in his effort to end America's longest war.
- The deadline for Biden's withdrawal is significant as **September 11, 2021, is 20 years after the 9/11 terror attacks in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania** that led the US to target Afghanistan.
- Around **7,000 non-U.S. forces from mainly NATO countries**, also from Australia, New Zealand and Georgia, **outnumber the 2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan**. They too have announced a **withdrawal from Afghanistan in coordination with a U.S. pull-out**.

Details:

- Around 7,000 **non-U.S. forces from mainly NATO countries**, also from Australia, New Zealand and Georgia, outnumber the **2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan**.
- A **key reason for a coordinated withdrawal** is the fact that **NATO relies on U.S. airlift capabilities** and shipping to move valuable equipment in and out of landlocked Afghanistan.
- After withdrawing, the U.S. and NATO aim to rely on Afghan military and police forces, which they have developed with billions of dollars in funding, to maintain security though peace talks are struggling and the insurgency is resilient.

Resolute Support:

- An integral part of NATO's current mission, **Resolute Support**, is to **train and equip Afghan security forces fighting the Islamist Taliban**.
 - **Taliban was ousted from power** by a U.S. invasion in late **2001** and has since **waged an insurgency**.
- With non-U.S. troop numbers reaching as high as 40,000 in 2008, Europe, Canada and Australia have moved in tandem with the U.S., also providing long-term funding to rebuild Afghanistan despite the resurgence of Taliban-led violence and endemic official corruption in the country.

4. It is getting from bad to worse for women workers

Background:

Gender inequality in India:

- India has slipped from 112 to 140 amongst 156 countries in the 2021 **WEF Global Gender Gap Report**. Of the four pillars of the index, **India suffered mainly in economic participation**.
- **Gender inequality subsists in the Indian economy** as in other sectors like health, education and politics.
 - The **labour participation of women is 22 per cent in India, one of the lowest in the world** (comparable countries have 50 per cent).
 - The **wage gap** between men and women across the Indian economy is a marked feature in India.
 - Despite the fact that the number of women has increased in jobs, still, they lag behind in the total percentage of jobs. **The gender employment gap is substantial** given that only 18% of working-age women are employed as compared to 75% of men (Pre-pandemic statistics).

- Reasons include a lack of good jobs, restrictive social norms, and the burden of household work.

Economic impact of the pandemic:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a **massive disruption of the labour market** in India, rendering millions unemployed and has led to a sudden and large increase in poverty.

Details:

- The pandemic seems to have worsened the situation of gender inequality in India.
- The pandemic has affected more women than men. **Women workers, in particular, have borne a disproportionate burden of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns.**

A widening economic gap:

- Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. show that 61% of male workers were unaffected during the lockdown while only 19% of women experienced this kind of **work security**.
- Women have lost more jobs irrespective of the industry in which they were employed.
- Unlike men who had the option of moving into fallback employment arrangements like self-employment and daily wage work, women seemed to have far fewer options.
- 47% of employed women who had lost jobs during the lockdown, had not returned to work, while the number stood at only 7% for men.
- Nearly half of the women workers, irrespective of whether they were salaried, casual, or self-employed, withdrew from the workforce, as compared to only 11% of men.
- Even as new entrants to the workforce, women workers had poorer options compared to men. Women were more likely to enter as daily wage workers while men found avenues for self-employment. This leads to **more precarious work and lower earnings** as compared to men.

Growing domestic work:

- With the lockdowns in place and almost everyone limited to the confines of their homes, household responsibilities have increased for women. **There has been a massive increase in the burden of household work for women.**
 - The India Working Survey 2020 found that among employed men, the number of hours spent on paid work remained more or less unchanged

after the pandemic. But for women, the number of hours spent in domestic work has increased manifold. This increase in household work came without any accompanying relief in the hours spent on paid work.

- This could lead to a situation where married women and women from larger households are less likely to return to work, suggesting that the burden of care may be a reason for **poor employment recovery**.

Recommendations:

Short term measures:

- Expansion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
- Introduction of an **urban employment guarantee** targeted at women.
- There should be coordinated efforts by states to **facilitate the employment of women** while also addressing immediate needs through the setting up of community kitchens, prioritising the opening of schools and anganwadi centres.
- The governments should consider a **COVID-19 hardship allowance** of at least Rs. 5,000 per month for six months for 2.5 million accredited social health activists and Anganwadi workers, most of whom are women.

Long term measures:

- **The National Employment Policy**, currently in the works, should systematically **address the constraints around the participation of women's workforce**, both with respect to the availability of work and household responsibilities.
- The government should come up with **policies for sectors where women participation can be significant**, both in current (healthcare, IT, education, agriculture) and emerging (artificial intelligence, blockchain) areas.
- The government should focus on **increasing public investment in social infrastructure** like health, education, child and elderly care. This can help bring women into the workforce not only by directly creating employment for them but also by alleviating some of their domestic work burdens.
- Given the close link between educational attainment and economic participation and the big drop in enrolment of girls in primary (93 per cent), secondary (62 per cent) and tertiary (29 per cent) education, relevant interventions like Skill India should develop programmes for girls/women and address the systemic issues.
- There is the need to embrace **policies for inclusion** that help women progress in career, with up-skilling and "return-to-career" schemes, flexi-work, special

leave, wage parity, hybrid working models, and so on. **A concerted effort across key sectors with a cultural focus on gender sensitivity** instead of gender neutrality can help.

Conclusion:

- In the pandemic, women have borne a disproportionate burden of the severe disruptions to life and the economy.
- **The govt and businesses must join hands to empower women economically.** This apart from the obvious **social benefit of gender equality** will also give a **big boost to the GDP** of the nation.
 - The global GDP could rise by as much as \$28 trillion by 2025 if, for instance, women play an equal role to men in labour markets. If small, medium and large businesses – both domestic and MNCs – join hands with the government to close the gender gap in economic empowerment, **India could add at least a trillion annually to its GDP by 2029.**
 - Companies with more women representation have achieved 22 per cent higher productivity, 40 per cent better customer retention and 27 per cent more profitability.

5. UNSC calls for end to violence in Gaza

What's in News?

UN Secretary-General pleaded for an **immediate end to the deadly violence in Gaza, warning that the fighting could plunge the region into an uncontrollable security and humanitarian crisis.**

Details:

- The heaviest fighting in years is sparked by unrest in Jerusalem.
- Israel's Army said that about **3,000 rockets had been fired from the coastal strip towards Israel** (the highest ever) of which about **450 failed launches fell in the Gaza Strip.**
- Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system had intercepted over 1,000 rockets.

Iron Dome System:

- Iron Dome is a **multi-mission system capable of intercepting rockets, artillery, mortars and Precision Guided Munitions** like very short-range air defence (V-SHORAD) systems as well as **aircraft, helicopters and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)** over short ranges of up to 70 km.

- It is an **all-weather system** and can **engage multiple targets simultaneously** and be **deployed over land and sea**.
- The I-DOME is the mobile variant with all components on a single truck and C-DOME is the naval version for deployment on ships.
- The intensity of the conflict is unprecedented with non-stop airstrikes in densely populated Gaza and rockets reaching big cities in Israel.

Way Forward:

- The **UN, Qatar and Egypt are trying to broker a ceasefire**.
- The trust deficit between Israel and Palestinian authorities is increasing, as there have been no direct negotiations between the two. Efforts are necessary to create conducive conditions for the **resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine**.

6. Virus situation worsens among tribals

What's in News?

The **COVID-19 situation** appears to have worsened in certain **areas inhabited by Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Odisha**.

- Many individuals belonging to the Dongria Kondh community and Bonda community have tested positive for COVID-19.
 - **Dongria Kondh is a PVTG in the Niyamgiri Hill range of Rayagada district in Odisha.**
 - Bonda community is a PVTG in **Bonda Hill in Malkangiri district.**

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups:

- Particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) (earlier: Primitive tribal group) is a **government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices**.
- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission** created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups.
- PVTGs have some **basic characteristics** – they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change, etc.
- There are **75 PVTGs in India**.

Note:

- **Odisha has among the largest and most diverse tribal populations in the country.**
- Of the 62 tribal groups residing in Odisha, **13 are recognised as PVTGs.**
- According to the 2011 Census, Odisha's share of the country's total tribal population was 9%.
 - Tribals constitute 22.85% of the State's population.
- The **PVTGs such as Bonda, Birhor, Chuktia Bhunjia, Didayi, Dongaria Kandha, Hill Kharia, Juang, Kutia Kondh, Lanjia Saora, Lodha, Mankirdia, Paudi Bhuyan and Saora** have been identified on the basis of:
 - Stagnant or diminishing populations.
 - Subsistence level of economy associated with pre-agricultural stages of hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation.
 - Relative physical isolation.

7. Adoption issues to the fore as COVID-19 leaves many orphaned

Context:

The second wave of COVID-19 has left many children extremely vulnerable, particularly those who have been orphaned.

Details:

- **Only a district Child Welfare Committee could decide the future of children found orphaned** in such circumstances.
- The CWC would first make efforts to find members of the birth family and then make an assessment.

Kinship care:

- **Children having faced crisis such as a loss of a family member or separation from their parents due to death and desertion experience high emotional trauma.**
- Experts have suggested that **adoption for such children was neither the first nor the best option**, and **recommended kinship care** as a more suitable alternative.
 - The intervention required in such situations is **assistance and support for the prevention of family separation.**
- Where relatives are interested to help, they could follow the **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956**, or the **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015**, to adopt or **seek legal custody** under the **Guardianship and Wards Act, 1890.**
- It is suggested that the Ministry of Women and Child Development and all State departments concerned should immediately **roll out a kinship care**

programme and make it part of foster care provisions under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

- State governments must make kinship care part of the child protection system such as **Maharashtra's Bal Sangopan Yojana**, where the **State grants educational support of ₹1,000 per month** to families to look after orphaned children.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

8. Five killed as gale force winds, rain pummel Kerala, Karnataka

Context:

Gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tidal waves swept the coastal belt of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa as Cyclone Tauktae hurtled northwards towards Gujarat.

Gale-force winds

- A gale force wind is a strong, persistent wind with a **minimum speed of 50 km/h (31 mph) and a maximum speed of 102 km/h (63 mph)**, which are **typically associated with coastal regions**.
- Typically, these strong winds are caused by a **rapid drop in air pressure**.
- **Cyclones are classified on the basis of wind speed**.
- If the **Deep Depression develops gale force wind speeds of between 63–88 km/h (39–54 mph)**, it is called a **Cyclonic storm**.

Details:

- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), **Tauktae**, which has intensified into a **very severe cyclonic storm**, is **likely to intensify further** and reach the Gujarat coast.
- The water level in many dams across Kerala rose after heavy rain in the catchment areas.
- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and IMD forecast damage over Porbandar, Amreli Junagarh, Gir Somnath, Botad, Bhavnagar, and the coastal areas of Ahmedabad.

About Cyclone 'Tauktae':

- India Meteorological Department (IMD) has informed that Cyclone 'Tauktae' is expected to touch the Gujarat coast between Porbandar & Naliya around 18th May afternoon/evening with the wind speed ranging up to 175 kmph.
- It is likely to cause heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of Gujarat, including extremely heavy falls in Junagadh & Gir Somnath and heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places in the districts of Saurashtra Kutch & Diu.
- IMD also warned of a storm surge of about 2- 3 m above astronomical tide to inundate some coastal areas in Gujarat.
- Indian Coast Guard and the Navy have deployed ships and helicopters for relief, search and rescue operations. Air Force and Engineer task force units of Army, with boats and rescue equipment, are on standby for deployment.
- The cyclone is expected to affect the west coast of India including the states of Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, West Rajasthan, Lakshadweep Islands and also parts of Tamil Nadu.
- NDRF is assisting the State agencies in their preparedness for evacuating people from vulnerable locations and is also continuously holding community awareness campaign on how to deal with the cyclonic situation.
- Sea conditions will be very rough over the southeast Arabian Sea and adjoining Lakshadweep – Maldives area & equatorial Indian Ocean and fishermen have been warned to suspend all fishing activities.
- It is very likely to intensify further into a Severe Cyclonic Storm during the next 6 hours and into a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm during the subsequent 12 hours.
- 'Tauktae' has been named by Myanmar.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Cultural Exchange Programme between India and Mongolia

Why in News

Recently, the Minister of State for Culture discussed various issues under the **Cultural Exchange Programme** with his Mongolian counterpart.

Key Points

- **Highlights of the Meet:**
 - Strengthening the **strategic partnership**- established in 2015.
 - The **Cultural Exchange Program** between India and Mongolia stands renewed until 2023.
 - **10 dedicated ICCR scholarships** for studying '**Tibetan Buddhism**' have been allocated for Mongolians to study in specialized institutes of CIBS, Leh and CUTS, Varanasi, starting from 2020-2021.
 - The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** is an **autonomous organisation of the Government of India**, involved in **India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy)**, through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
 - **Tibetan Buddhism combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic**, and material from an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon.
 - India reiterated its commitment for **digitization of Buddhist manuscripts in Gandan monastery** and would consider Mongolia's request for assistance in setting up a museum-cum-library there.
 - The Ministry of Culture is likely to complete reprinting of about **100 sets of sacred Mongolian Kanjur** by 2022 for distribution in the main centers of Buddhism in Mongolia.
 - **Mongolian Kanjur** is a **Buddhist canonical text in 108 volumes** and is considered to be the most important religious text in Mongolia. It has been translated from Tibetan and is **written in classical mongolian**.
 - In the Mongolian language '**Kanjur**' means '**Concise Orders**'- the words of Lord Buddha in particular.

- Highlighted steps taken to **facilitate the visa and travel of Buddhist monks from Mongolia** within India.
- **India-Mongolia Relations:**
 - **Historical Relations:**
 - India and Mongolia have interacted through **Buddhism** throughout history.
 - **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India was the first country outside the former Soviet bloc of nations to open diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1955.
 - In 2015, Mongolia witnessed the first ever visit by the Prime Minister of India (a part of **India's Act East policy**).
 - **International Cooperation:**
 - Mongolia has publicly reiterated its **support for India's membership to the permanent seat of the expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
 - India has played an important role in **getting Mongolia membership to key international forums**, including the **United Nations (UN)**, despite strong opposition from China and Taiwan. India also championed the **inclusion of Mongolia in the Non-Aligned Movement**.
 - In a reciprocal gesture, **Mongolia co-sponsored a 1972 UN resolution** with India and Bhutan for the recognition of **the newly liberated Bangladesh**.
 - Other Forums of which both the countries are members: **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.
 - India is a member whereas Mongolia is an observer state at the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.
 - **Economic Cooperation:**
 - India - Mongolia bilateral trade was USD 35.3 million in 2020, down from USD 38.3 million in 2019.
 - India has undertaken the '**Mongol refinery project**' under its Lines of Credit (LoC) programme.
 - **Cultural Cooperation:**
 - The **India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation**, signed in 1961, has governed the **Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP)** between the two countries.
 - The Agreement envisages co-operation in the fields of education by way of scholarships, exchange of experts, participation in conferences, etc.
 - **Defence Cooperation:**
 - Joint defence exercises code-named **Nomadic Elephant**.
 - India is also an active participant in an annual week-long joint training exercise called the **Khaan Quest**, hosted by Mongolia.

- **Cooperation over Environmental Issues:**
 - Part of the **Bishkek Declaration (snow leopard)**.

Way Forward

- Mongolia's strategic position at the cross junction of Central Asia, Northeast Asia, far East, China and Russia attracts major powers towards it. India should consider Mongolia as a green zone of economic development that absorbs hi-tech features and production skills in a modernization process.
- To preserve and promote the common heritage of Indo-Mongolian culture is important. This should serve as the basis for nurturing and pursuing future common interests.

2. Article 311 of the Indian Constitution

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

What is Article 311?

- Article 311 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 owner that appointed him/her.
- Section 2 of the article 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.

Various safeguards under Art. 311

- Article 311 is meant to act as a safeguard for civil servants that give them a chance to respond to the charges in an enquiry so that he/she is not arbitrarily dismissed from service.
- The article also provides exceptions to these safeguards under subclause 2 provision b.
- It states "when an 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 enquiry".

What is the process of a departmental enquiry?

- In a departmental enquiry, after an enquiry officer is appointed, the civil servant is given a formal chargesheet of the charges.
- The civil servant can represent himself/herself or choose to have a lawyer.
- Witnesses can be called during the departmental enquiry following which the enquiry officer can prepare a report and submit it to the government for further action.

Are there other exceptions where a person can be dismissed without departmental enquiry?

- As per Article 311 subclause 2 provision a, if a government employee is convicted in a criminal case, he can be dismissed without DE.
- Apart from this, under 311 (2) (c), a government employee can be dismissed when the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied in the interest of the security of the state.

Can the dismissal under section 311 (2) be challenged by the government employee?

- Yes, the government employee dismissed under these provisions can approach either tribunal like the state administrative tribunal or the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) or the Courts.

3. Cyclone Tauktae

Cyclone Tauktae (pronounced Tau-Te), classified as a very severe cyclonic storm (VSCS) and developed in the Arabian Sea, is wreaking havoc all across the Indian Coast.

Cyclone Tauktae

- Tauktae is a currently active and strengthening tropical cyclone threatening the state of Gujarat in India and impacting the states Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra.
- It is the fourth cyclone in consecutive years to have developed in the Arabian Sea, that too in the pre-monsoon period (April to June).
- All these cyclones since 2018 have been categorised as either 'Severe Cyclone' or above.
- Once Tauktae makes its landfall, three of these will have hit either the Gujarat or Maharashtra coast.

- After Cyclone Mekanu in 2018, which struck Oman, Cyclone Vayu in 2019 struck Gujarat, followed by Cyclone Nisarga in 2020 that struck Maharashtra.

What is aiding such rapid intensification?

- Any tropical cyclone requires energy to stay alive.
- This energy is typically obtained from the warm water and humid air over the tropical ocean.
- Currently, seawater up to depths of 50 metres has been very warm, supplying ample energy to enable the intensification of Cyclone Tauktae.
- The more the heat released through condensation of water vapour, the steeper the drop in pressure.
- A low-pressure system undergoes multiple stages of intensification to form cyclones.

Not a rare phenomenon

- Typically, tropical cyclones in the North Indian Ocean region (the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea) develop during the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon (October to December) periods.
- May-June and October-November are known to produce cyclones of severe intensity that affect the Indian coasts.

Is the Arabian Sea becoming cyclone-friendly?

- Annually, five cyclones on average form in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea combined.
- Of these, four developments in the Bay of Bengal, which is warmer than the Arabian Sea.
- In the Arabian Sea, cyclones typically develop over the Lakshadweep area and largely traverse westwards, or away from India's west coast.
- However, in recent years, meteorologists have observed that the Arabian Sea, too, has been warming. This is a phenomenon associated with global warming.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4.SWAMIH Fund

Why in News

Recently, the Government of India's **Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH)** completed its **first residential project**.

- **The residential project - Rivali Park**, located in **suburban Mumbai**, was the **first housing project in India** to have received funding under the **SWAMIH Fund**.

Key Points

- **About the SWAMIH Fund:**
 - This is a government backed fund that was set up as a **Category-II AIF (Alternate Investment Fund)** debt fund **registered with SEBI**, launched in 2019.
 - **SWAMIH Investment Fund** was formed to complete construction of stalled, **RERA-registered** affordable and mid-income category housing projects which are stuck due to paucity of funds.
 - The **Investment Manager** of the Fund is **SBICAP Ventures**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of SBI Capital Markets, which in turn is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the **State Bank of India**.
 - The **Sponsor of the Fund** is the **Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance**, on behalf of the Government of India.

RERA

- **Inception:**
 - **Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA)** is an act passed by the Parliament in 2016 that came into effect fully **from 1st May, 2017**.
 - The Act establishes Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) in each state for regulation of the real estate sector and also acts as an adjudicating body for speedy dispute resolution.
- **Aim:**
 - It seeks to protect **home-buyers** as well as help **boost investments in the real estate sector** by bringing efficiency and transparency in the sale/purchase of real estate.

- **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF):**
 - AIF means any fund established or incorporated in India which is a privately pooled investment vehicle which collects funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign, for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy for the benefit of its investors.
 - **Regulation 2(1)(b) of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Regulations (AIFs), 2012** lays down the definition of AIFs.
 - Through a company, or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), an Alternative Investment Fund can be established.
 - AIF does not include funds covered under the SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996, SEBI (Collective Investment Schemes) Regulations, 1999 or any other regulations of the Board to regulate fund management activities.
 - Other exemptions include family trusts, employee welfare trusts or gratuity trusts.
 - **Categories of AIFs:**
 - **Category-I AIFs:**
 - These funds are **invested in** businesses that have the potential to grow financially such as **StartUps, Small and Medium Enterprises**.
 - The government encourages investments in these ventures as they have a positive impact on the economy with regards to high output and job creation.
 - **Examples** include Infrastructure Funds, Angel Funds, Venture Capital Funds and Social Venture Funds.
 - **Category-II AIFs:**
 - Under this category, funds that are **invested in equity securities and debt securities** are included. Those funds not already under Category I and III respectively are also included. No concession is given by the government for any investment made for Category II AIFS.
 - **Examples** include Real Estate Funds, Debt Fund, Private Equity Funds.
 - **Category-III AIFs:**
 - Category-III AIFs are those funds which **give returns under a short period of time**. These funds use complex and diverse trading strategies to achieve their goals. There is no known concession or incentive given towards these funds specifically by the government.
 - **Examples** include Hedge Funds, Private Investment in Public Equity Funds, etc.

5)2-DG: DRDO's new oral drug for Covid-19

Defence Minister has released the first batch of the indigenously developed anti-Covid-19 drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose or '2-DG'.

What is the news?

- The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had cleared the formulation on May 1 for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe Covid-19 patients.

What is 2-DG?

- 2-DG has been developed by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), New Delhi, a lab of the DRDO in collaboration with Hyderabad-based pharma company Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL).
- The 2-DG anti-Covid drug is expected to reduce dependence on medical oxygen in Covid-19 infected patients.
- The pseudo glucose molecule in the drug stops the virus in the tracts.
- Hence, it has been prescribed for Coronavirus infected patients requiring critical medical oxygen.

How does it work?

- Clinical trial data show that the molecule helps in faster recovery of patients hospitalized with Covid-19, and reduces their dependence on supplemental oxygen.
- The drug accumulates in virus-infected cells, and prevents the growth of the virus by stopping viral synthesis and energy production.
- Its selective accumulation in virally-infected cells makes this drug unique.

Advantages

- 2-DG being a generic molecule and an analogue of glucose, it can be easily produced and made available in large quantities.
- The drug is available in powder form in a sachet, and can be taken orally after dissolving in water.

6.National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage

Why in News

The Union Cabinet has approved a **Rs. 18,100-crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** for manufacturers of **Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC)** battery storage, to reduce imports.

- The scheme is called the **National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage (NPACC)**. It is under the **Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises**.

Key Points

- **PLI Scheme:**
 - It aims to **give companies incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units**.
 - It invites foreign companies to set units in India, however, it also aims to encourage local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units.
 - The PLI Scheme **has also been approved for sectors** such as automobiles, pharmaceuticals, IT hardware including laptops, mobile phones & telecom equipment, white goods, chemical cells and textiles, etc.
- **Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC):**
 - ACCs are the **new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy** and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
 - Such battery storages will **cater not only to electric vehicles but also to the consumer electronics** industry and electricity grids.
- **About NPACC Scheme:**
 - The plan is to **set up 50 gigawatt hour (GWh) manufacturing capacity for ACC batteries** by attracting investments totaling Rs. 45,000 crore.
 - Requires each selected ACC battery Storage manufacturer to set-up **an ACC manufacturing facility of minimum 5 GWh capacity**, achieve a **domestic value addition of at least 25%** and incur the mandatory **investment Rs.225 crore /GWh within 2 Years**.
 - Furthermore, the beneficiary firms need to ensure a **minimum 60% domestic value addition** at the Project level within **five years**.
 - The **incentive** will be disbursed **over a period of five years**. It will be paid out **on the basis of sales, energy efficiency, battery life cycle, and localization levels**.
- **Expected Benefits from NPACC Scheme:**
 - Facilitate **demand creation for battery storage** in India.
 - Facilitate **Make-in-India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

- Facilitate demand for **Electric Vehicles (EVs)**, which are proven to be significantly less polluting.
 - A key contributing factor to **reduce India's GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions.**
- **Import substitution** of around Rs. 20,000 crore every year.
- **Impetus to Research & Development** to achieve higher specific energy density and cycles in ACC.
- Promote **newer and niche cell technologies.**



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following Indian state/s share a physical border with Myanmar and Bangladesh?

1. Nagaland
2. Mizoram
3. Manipur
4. Tripura

Select the correct answer.

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

2. Which among the following belong to Snow Leopard range countries.

1. Russia
2. Mongolia
3. India
4. Iran
5. Kyrgyzstan

Select the correct answer.

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The elusive snow leopard inhabits parts of 12 countries:

Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

3. Sahrawi tribe is associated with which of the following countries?

- a. Botswana
- b. Kenya
- c. Mauritania
- d. Democratic Republic of Congo

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Sahrawi tribe are people living in the western part of the Sahara desert.
- It includes **Western Sahara**, southern Morocco, much of Mauritania and the extreme southwest of Algeria.

4. Consider the following statements. Ecomark is a certification mark issued

1. By the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)
2. for both electronic products and appliances

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

Answer : C

Explanation:

Ecomark is issued by the BIS to products (not just appliances) conforming to a set of standards aimed at the least impact on the ecosystem. One of the purposes of the mark is increasing awareness among the consumers towards reducing environment impact. A wide variety of criteria are taken into account: Production process including source of raw material; Case of Natural Resources; Likely impact on the environment; Energy conservation in the production of the product etc.

Learning: For the implementation of the scheme, BIS is responsible for the following functions:

- i) Assessment of the product for ECO Mark, certification of the product for award of ECO Mark.
- ii) Renewal, suspension and cancellation of the licence.
- iii) Products certified as eligible for the ECO Mark shall also carry the ISI Mark (except for leather) for quality, safety and performance of the product and shall be licensed to carry the ECO Mark for a prescribed time period after which it shall be reassessed.
- iv) Undertaking inspections and taking samples for analysis of any material or substance in relation to which the BIS – ECO Mark has been used as may be necessary for proper implementation of ECO Mark. For this purpose the Standard Mark of Bureau would be a single mark having a combination of the ISI Mark and the ECO Logo

5) The Volcano Mt.Lewotolok recently in news is located in?

- a. Italy
- b. Chile
- c. Japan
- d. Indonesia

Answer : d

Explanaion:

Mount Ili Lewotolok

- It is located on Lembata island of East Nusa Tenggara province in Indonesia.
- It is one of the three currently erupting in Indonesia along with Merapi on Java Island and Sinabung on Sumatra Island.
- Mount Ili Lewotolok has been erupting on and off since October 2017.

6. Gale crater, sometimes seen in the news recently, is located in which of the following?

- a. Mars
- b. Moon
- c. Saturn
- d. Jupiter

Answer : a

Explanation:

- A research study published in *Scientific Reports* recently suggests that around four billion years ago floods of unimaginable magnitude washed through Gale Crater on Mars' equator.
- The research findings were ascertained from the data collected by NASA's Curiosity rover.
- This research puts a stamp on the possibility of supporting microbial life on the fourth planet of our solar system.

Gale Crater

- Gale Crater formed when a meteor hit Mars in its early history, about 3.5 to 3.8 billion years ago.
- The meteor impact punched a hole in the terrain.
- The explosion ejected rocks and soil that landed around the crater.
- Gale crater has always fascinated the scientists as the Curiosity rover science team has already confirmed that it was once home to persistent lakes and streams.
- Scientists chose Gale Crater as the landing site for Curiosity because it has many signs that water was present over its history.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Labour-intensive sectors such as housing, construction, exports, garments, tourism, education and health should be focus area for maximizing employment generation. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Give extent of unemployment and underemployment.
- Elaborate on role of Labor intensive sectors in employment generation.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. Right to Education Act, 2009 is a breakthrough in India's education landscape. Critically Examine. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly introduce key provisions of RTE Act.
- Explain its significance.
- List some of the loopholes in the Act.
- Conclude by suggesting steps that need to be taken.