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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. A thaw in India-Pakistan trade relations?

Context:

- The rejection by the Pakistan government of the recent proposal made to it by the Pakistani Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to import sugar, cotton and cotton yarn from India.

Background:

Restriction in bilateral trade:

- In 2019, India and Pakistan undertook trade-restrictive measures against each other.
 - After the Pulwama terror attack, **India withdrew the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status of Pakistan and imposed a customs duty hike of 200% on imports.**
 - When India revoked the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, **Pakistan suspended bilateral trade with India.**

Details:

- Despite the disappointment with the Pakistan decision, the article expresses a **possibility of resumption of trade relations** between the two countries in the coming times based on the following reasons.

History of ups and downs:

- Even though trade curbs have been applied several times in the past, such measures have been reversed to create a trade enhancing environment when the relations stabilized.
- There have been growing indications of back channel talks between the two neighbours and the recent developments like the extension of the ceasefire agreement between the two nations are indicative of a **thaw in their otherwise troubled and strained relationship.**

Pressure of the pandemic:

- The Pakistan government had lifted the trade ban on the **import of medicines** and raw material from India to avert a health crisis.
- Now there is a demand for the inclusion of more items like sugar, cotton and yarn. These are critical not just for domestic consumption but also for the **domestic industries which have had to face the wrath of the pandemic.**

Continued trade despite restrictions:

- The available data indicate that there has been substantial **trade between the two countries in the recent past.**
 - During 2020-21 (April-February), the recorded bilateral trade was \$280 million, of which India's exports to Pakistan were \$278 million and imports were \$2 million with even banned items like sugar being exported to Pakistan.
 - A sizeable number of items have been traded between the two countries. This is despite the complete ban on trade by Pakistan on both exports and imports.
- Thus, even under restrictive trade conditions, there has been unimpeded trade between the two countries.
 - **Informal channels for trade** have functioned for decades and are a ready option for traders from both countries.

Significance of bilateral trade:

- The trade in essential agricultural commodities could **help stabilise domestic prices and take care of seasonal shortages and food security in the home country.**
- A robust bilateral trade augurs well for several important **domestic and export industries** in both countries.
- There are **significant costs of non-cooperation** on the economic front. Given the interdependencies between India and Pakistan, restrictions on trade only shift trade to informal channels. The informal channels cost more and are not dependable.
- The **increased trade relation and economic interdependence could also play a critical role in easing the strained bilateral relation.**

Conclusion:

- Given the potential benefits of a robust trade relation, India and Pakistan must initiate a **process for a gradual deepening of the bilateral trade.** This could begin with a positive list for trade, which has to be expanded over the years to move towards complete normalisation.

- **Business organisations and chambers of commerce should play an important role** in creating a strong lobby that could help revive the trade dialogue between the two nations.

2. Scrap new privacy policy, Centre tells WhatsApp

Context:

The government of India sent a **notice to WhatsApp** asking it to **withdraw the controversial update to its privacy policy**.

Details:

- The MeitY notice **directs WhatsApp to withdraw its Privacy Policy 2021** as the changes and the manner of introducing these changes **undermine the sacrosanct values of informational privacy, data security and user choice for Indian users and harms the rights and interests of Indian citizens**.
- The Ministry highlighted how the new policy violated several provisions of Indian laws.
- The notice warned the firm that the **failure to give a satisfactory response** may result in **steps in consonance with law**.

Issues raised:

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in an affidavit, said the policy was not in tune with the IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011.
 - Notably, the rules require a body corporate who collects, stores or otherwise deals with data to issue a privacy policy providing for certain safeguards, in addition to imposing various other obligations.
- According to MeitY, the impugned privacy policy violates the 2011 Rules.
- The Ministry also pointed out that WhatsApp's policy fails to specify types of sensitive personal data being collected, highlighting that there was no distinction between personal data or sensitive personal data which would be collected.
- It added that WhatsApp also failed to notify users of details of the collection of sensitive personal information.
- Further, the new privacy policy fails to provide an option to withdraw consent retrospectively.

3. U.S. to waive sanctions on firm behind Russia's Nord Stream 2

Context:

The U.S. government is **considering waiving sanctions** on the company behind **Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Europe.**

Details:

- It is believed that the **administration under President Joe Biden** still opposed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline but felt it was important to **send a signal about its commitment to ties with Germany**, which were badly damaged under former President Donald Trump.

Nord Stream 2 System:

- The under-construction pipeline **will run along the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system**, and the **two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic metres of gas to Germany per year.**
- The pipeline falls in **German and Danish territory.**
- This would take the **Russian gas to Europe via Germany, under the Baltic Sea.**

Why is the Pipeline Controversial?

- Since it was first planned, Nord Stream 2 has **drawn criticism from the US.**
- The US believes that the **project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas**, thus boldening its President Vladimir Putin.
 - Currently, **EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.**
- Ukraine also has issues with the project.
 - Relations between Ukraine and Russia have seriously deteriorated in the aftermath of the Crimean conflict in 2014.
 - There is an existing land pipeline between Russia and Europe that runs through Ukraine, which feels that **once Nord Storm 2 is completed, Russia could bypass the Ukrainian pipeline, and deprive the country of lucrative transit fees.**

4. A collage of laws that leaves the worker out in the cold

Background:

Social Security Code 2020:

- India's Parliament in September 2020 passed a Social Security Code.
- The Social Security Code 2020 merges existing social security laws. It **amalgamates and rationalizes the provisions of eight existing central labour laws.**

- The code attempts to **include informal workers** within the ambit of social security administration.

Impact of the pandemic on the informal workers:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of millions in India, more so for the low-paid, **informal workers, who constitute 91% of the workforce**. The **loss of jobs and income cuts have pushed this vulnerable section further into debt and poverty**.
- In such a scenario, the lack of a comprehensive social security cover for the informal workers is a major concern.
 - Despite existing social security schemes run by State governments under the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008**, still, a large number of informal workers are outside the ambit of any social security even after 13 years.

Concerns associated with the new Social Security code:

- The article, analyzing the effectiveness of the new social security code in ensuring the much needed social security for the needy, notes that **the code fails to ensure universalization of social security**.

Exclusion of certain benefits for unorganized workers:

- Even under the new code, **employees provident fund, employees state insurance (ESI), maternity benefit, gratuity continue to be entirely for organised sector workers**.

Hurdles for informal workers:

- The **lack of awareness among informal workers** regarding social security schemes is a critical impediment in the universalization of social security.
- The legal framework as proposed in the Code and Rules requires the informal workers to register as beneficiaries to receive social security benefits. The informal worker will have to **register on the specified online portal** to be developed by the central government. This could act as a major impediment for the workers.
 - Online registration poses a significant challenge as most informal workers **lack digital literacy and connectivity**.
 - Informal workers also **find it difficult to furnish documentary papers** required as part of the registration process.
 - Given that most informal workers are footloose casual workers on the move from one place to another in search of livelihoods, they may find it difficult to provide address proof.

- Given the absence of tangible employer-employee relations in informal employments, such workers may find it difficult to provide proof of livelihood and income details.
- Thus the requirement of registration may deter informal workers from completing the registration and they may continue to remain outside the social security ambit.

Lack of concrete measures:

- The code proposes that both the central and state governments will formulate schemes for unorganised workers as and when they deem fit. The **absence of definite and unambiguous provisions** in the present code would further complicate the achievement of universal registration.

Lack of an integrated structure:

- Despite the **footloose nature of unorganised workers**, the code does not provide for inter-state arrangement and cooperation. Without an integrated structure, the implications of this code would be too varied across states to be administered and would render the whole process to become complicated and ineffective.
- Previous attempts at providing holistic social security cover for the unorganised workforce in a simple and effective manner have been lost in the **Centre-State labyrinth and jurisdictional or institutional overlap**.

Lack of an all inclusive approach:

- The code fails to imbibe an all inclusive approach by continuing to **adopt a labour market classification based social security benefit programmes**.
- It fails to consider the unorganized workforce as one unit.

Thresholds of the number of workers employed:

- Key benefits like maternity benefit, employees provident fund and gratuity continue to be available for workers in those establishments that have employees above a certain threshold.
- Hence these critical provisions have **not been made universal and continue to remain inaccessible for a vast majority of informal workers**.
- Also such clauses **disincentive the employers to formalize the existing workforce**, thus depriving the economy of the benefits of formalization.

Conclusion:

- The universalization of social security remains an unfulfilled aspiration in the new code on social security.
- There is an urgent need to recognise that **India is ageing without social security**, and the demographic dividend of the young workforce that could support the ageing ends in 15 years.

5. Storm likely in Bay of Bengal

Context:

The India Meteorological Department said that a low pressure area (a precursor to cyclonic storm) is likely to form in the eastern Bay of Bengal and the Northern Andaman Sea.

Details:

- The formation of the depression **comes close on the heels of Cyclone Tauktae**, which left a trail of destruction along the western coast.
 - **Cyclone Tauktae is the fourth cyclone** in consecutive years to develop in **cyclone shy Arabian Sea** in the pre-monsoon months.
 - Cyclone Nisarga (2020), Cyclone Vayu (2019) and Cyclone Mekanu (2018) are the other cyclones that have originated in the Arabian Sea in the recent past.
- **Storms are common in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea** in May, **ahead of the monsoon onset**.
- A weather system **draws on the heat and moisture to gain strength in the sea**.
- According to IMD, the **surface temperature of the Bay of Bengal is on the higher side** which would likely provide the ammunition the weather system needs **to turn into a cyclone**.
- If the cyclone takes shape, it will be called **Yaas**, a name given by **Oman**.

Why is the Bay of Bengal more prone to Cyclones?

- The **low-pressure system of cyclone needs a continuous supply of heat energy**. The **Bay of Bengal is warmer than the Arabian Sea**, and hence is able to provide the heat energy needed to sustain the low-pressure system.
- **Sea surface temperatures and humidity directly correlate with the chances of cyclone formation**.
 - The Bay of Bengal receives higher rainfall and constant inflow of fresh water from the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers and the surface water keeps getting refreshed, making it impossible for the warm water to mix with the cooler water below. This condition is ideal for depression.

- The Arabian Sea receives stronger winds that help dissipate the heat, and the lack of constant fresh water supply helps the warm water mix with the cool water, reducing the temperature.
- **The absence of a large landmass between the Pacific and the Bay** allows cyclonic winds to easily move into the Bay of Bengal.
- **Low-pressure system originating from the Pacific ocean** also travel towards the left to the Bay of Bengal.

6. Rajasthan govt. declares mucormycosis an epidemic

Context:

Amid the increasing instances of **mucormycosis (black fungus)**, the **Rajasthan government** has declared it an epidemic and a notifiable disease.

Details:

- At present, the State has more than 100 black fungus patients.
- It will be **mandatory for the health facilities to report every case of the disease in the State.**
- The declaration of mucormycosis as an epidemic would ensure its “integrated and coordinated” treatment along with the treatment for COVID-19.
- The notification was issued under **the Rajasthan Epidemic Act, 2020.**

Mucormycosis:

- Mucormycosis or black fungus is **primarily affecting people recovering from COVID-19.**
- It is a **complication caused by a fungal infection.**
- Mucormycosis **affects the sinuses, brain, and lungs, and is life-threatening.**

What is an Epidemic?

- The epidemic is a term that is often broadly used to describe a **problem that has grown out of control.** It occurs **when a disease spreads rapidly to several people** within a country or location.
- Epidemics are **generally highly communicable diseases** that spread through the population in a very short time.
- These **diseases could be viral, bacterial or other health events such as obesity.**

Note:

Telangana has also declared the “black fungus” spreading in its hospitals an epidemic.

7. Interpretations which impede a just social order

Context:

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has declared the **Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018** as being unconstitutional.

Details:

- The judgement is based on the following three primary findings of the bench.
 - The Court held that the Maratha community did not constitute a socially and educationally backward class.
 - The law concerned was in breach of the rule set by the Supreme Court in the **Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (1992) judgement** which disallows reservations made in excess of 50% of the total available positions.
 - The Court noted that **State governments had no independent power to declare a group as a backward class** based on its interpretation of the 102nd constitutional amendment.

Concerns:

- The article expresses deep concerns over the judgement, especially with regard to the observations regarding the limit on reservations and the states' power to determine backward classes.

With regard to limit on reservation:

No constitutional backing:

- The text of **Articles 16(4) and 15(4)** which confer power on the government to make reservations for the deserving classes contains no limitation on reservation.
- Hence, the idea that **reservations ought to be restricted to 50%** does not stem from the Constitution but from the Supreme Court Judgement in the Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (1992) case. Hence the limit does not have constitutional backing.

Against the objective of attaining substantive equality:

- **Reservation is an important tool to obtain the objective of substantive equality as envisioned in the Indian Constitution.** It could impede the ability of States to secure a **just social order**.

With regard to states' power in determining backward classes:

Impede the right of certain communities:

- Until now, the central government and each of the State governments produced separate lists declaring communities as socially and educationally backward. As a result, backward communities that were kept out of the central list were entitled to reservation at least for those posts and seats under the control of the State government.
- The recent judgement stating that the state governments cannot exercise the right of classifying communities as backward may lead to a scenario where **deserving communities might lose the benefits offered by reservation.**

Interpretational errors:

- The bench seems to have overlooked, at least, two essential factors in its observation on the 102nd Amendment and its impact on the states' right to determine backward classes.
 - Article 342A clearly mentions the term "Central List" differentiating itself from the existent state lists. Thus the provision in question was intended towards the categorisation of groups as backward for the purposes of reservation to posts and seats under the Union government's control only. The SC's observation thus seems like impinging on the **plain meaning of the term "central list"**.
 - The Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment during the **parliamentary debate on the constitutional amendment bill** had reiterated that the changes envisaged via the 102nd Amendment did not intend to limit the powers of states in any way.

Against the principle of federalism:

- The Constitutional Bench's interpretation of the 102nd Amendment dispossessing the states from exercising the power to determine backward classes goes against the very essence of federalism, which again is a **basic structure of the Indian Constitution.**

Conclusion:

- **The interpretation of the 102nd Amendment seems to be against values of equality and federalism,** considered integral aspects of India's democracy.

- The Union Government has rightly filed a petition to review the judgment with respect to the limits it places on the power of State governments to determine backward classes. If the Supreme Court refuses the plea, the Parliament can amend the Constitution and grant to States the power to determine backwardness.

8. Putin, Xi hail ties at launch of work on nuclear plants in China

Context:

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping **launched the work on Russian-built nuclear power plants in China.**

Details:

- The work on pouring concrete into new units of the **Tianwan and Xudabao nuclear power plants** was initiated.
- **Tianwan nuclear power plant** was built in China, jointly with Russia and has been **operating since 2007.**
- **Xudabao station** is still **under construction.**
- According to the Russian President, units will be functional by 2026-2028 and that Russia and China are prepared to further develop nuclear power plants through joint construction.
- The Chinese President called nuclear energy a “**strategic priority for cooperation**” between the two countries.

9. 6 UNESCO heritage sites added in India

What's in News?

Six sites have been added to **India's tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites.**

- Six of the nine sites **submitted by the Archaeological Survey of India** had been **accepted by UNESCO for inclusion in the tentative list.**
 - This is a requirement before the final nomination of any site.
- The sites include the **Ganga ghats in Varanasi, temples of Kancheepuram** and the **Satpura Tiger Reserve** in Madhya Pradesh, **Maratha military architecture** in Maharashtra, **the Hire Benakal megalithic site** in Karnataka and **Bhedaghat-Lametghat** of Narmada Valley.
 - With the addition of these six sites, UNESCO has 48 proposals in the tentative list of India.

Note:

- UNESCO has already added **30 of India's cultural sites, 7 natural, and 1 mixed site** in its World Heritage List.
- **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** is the nodal department for forwarding the proposals to UNESCO.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

10. Tianwen-1: China's Mars Mission

Why in News

Recently, China's spacecraft **Tianwen-1** landed on Mars carrying its **first Mars rover** named **Zhurong**.

- It became the **third country** to land on Mars **after the US and Soviet Union**.
- **China's previous 'Yinghuo-1' Mars mission**, which was supported by a Russian spacecraft, **had failed** after it did not leave the earth's orbit and disintegrated over the Pacific Ocean **in 2012**.

Key Points

- **About the Tianwen-1 Mission:**
 - **Launch:**
 - The **Tianwen-1 Spacecraft** was **lifted off on a Long March 5 rocket**, from the Wenchang launch center in **July 2020**.
 - **Three Parts:**
 - The Spacecraft consists of three parts - the **orbiter, the lander and the rover** - which separated in Mars orbit.
 - The **orbiter will remain in the orbit for scientific operations** and to relay signals while the **lander-rover combination has made an autonomous descent and landing**.
 - The **lander from Tianwen-1 has touched down on Utopia Planitia**, a large plain in the northern hemisphere of Mars.
 - **Objectives:**
 - To conduct scientific investigations into the planet's soil, geological structure, environment, atmosphere and water.
 - The mission **will be the first to place a ground-penetrating radar** on the Martian surface, which will be able to study local geology, as well as rock, ice, and dirt distribution.
- **China's Other Space Programmes:**
 - **Chang'e-5** (Moon)

- Tianhe (Permanent Space Station)
- **Other Mars Missions:**
 - **NASA's Perseverance Rover**
 - **UAE's Hope Mars Mission** (UAE's first-ever interplanetary mission)
 - **India's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) or Mangalyaan:**
 - It was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh by **Indian Space Research Organisation** in November 2013.
 - It was launched on board a PSLV C25 rocket with the aim of studying Martian surface and mineral composition as well as scan its atmosphere for methane (an indicator of life on Mars).

Mars

- **Size and Distance:**
 - It is the **fourth planet from the Sun** and the **second-smallest** planet in the Solar System.
 - Mars is about **half the size of Earth**.
- **Similarity to the Earth (Orbit and Rotation):**
 - As Mars orbits the Sun, it completes **one rotation every 24.6 hours**, which is very similar to one day on **Earth (23.9 hours)**.
 - Mars' axis of rotation is **tilted 25 degrees** with respect to the plane of its orbit around the Sun. This is similar to **Earth**, which has an **axial tilt of 23.4 degrees**.
 - Mars has distinct seasons like Earth, but **they last longer than seasons on Earth**.
 - **Martian days are called sols** – short for 'solar day'.
- **Other Features:**
 - The **reason Mars looks reddish** is due to oxidation or rusting of iron in the rocks, and dust of Mars. Hence it is also called the **Red Planet**.
 - It has the **largest volcano** in the solar system i.e. **Olympus Mons**.
 - It has **two small moons, Phobos and Deimos**.

11. Centre raises subsidy on DAP fertilizers; no hike for farmers

Context:

Following a review meeting on fertilizer prices chaired by Prime Minister, the Central government has **enhanced the subsidy on di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertilizers**.

Details:

- The PM stressed that **farmers should get fertilizers at old rates despite the international rise in prices.**
- The latest move comes in order to **retain the selling price for farmers at the current level** of ₹1,200 per bag.

Note:

- Fertilisers supply one or more plant nutrients essential to the growth of plants.
- Diammonium phosphate (DAP) is the **main source of Phosphorous.**
- **Essential plant nutrients** based on the amounts of nutrients that are required by plants are distinguished as **macronutrients and micronutrients.**
- **Phosphorus is a macronutrient.**
- Other frequently used fertilizers are **muriate of potash (MOP) and Urea.**

What is Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme?

Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Programme for Fertilizers was initiated in the year 2010.

- Under the scheme, a fixed amount of subsidy decided on an annual basis is provided on each grade of subsidized Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers, except for Urea, based on the nutrient content present in them.
- The scheme is administered by the Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers.
- In a recent development, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers for the continuation of the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) till 2019-20.
- The continuation of the Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme will ensure that an adequate quantity of P&K is made available to the farmers at a statutory controlled price.

Union Budget 2021 and Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme

There have been no reforms in the Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme in Union Budget 2021. Though Nirmala Sitharaman made an announcement to release an additional Rs 65,000 crore towards fertilisers subsidy over and above Rs 71,000 crore allocated in the Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 21 and for FY22, she has allocated close to Rs 80,000 crore.

Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme (NBS) Provisions

In India, urea is the only controlled fertilizer and is sold at a statutory notified uniform sale price.

- Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme (NBS) allows the manufacturers, marketers, and importers to fix the MRP of the Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers at reasonable levels.
- The domestic and international cost of P&K fertilisers is considered along with the country's inventory levels and the currency exchange rate in order to decide the MRP.

Aims of the Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme

The aims of the NBS scheme are the following:

- The scheme aims at ensuring that a sufficient quantity of P&K is at the farmer's disposal at statutory controlled prices so that agricultural growth can be sustained and balanced nutrient application to the soil can be ensured.
- It aims at ensuring the balanced use of fertilizers, improving agricultural productivity, promoting the growth of the indigenous fertilizer industry, and also reducing the burden of subsidy.

Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme has been implemented with the expectation that it will promote balanced fertilization of the soil, which will lead to increased agricultural productivity and consequently better returns to the farmers.

Urea & Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme

What is Urea?

It is a white crystalline solid that contains 46 percent of nitrogen as an animal feed additive and fertilizer. It has various uses:

1. It is used in cropping.
2. It is also used as a cattle feed supplement.
3. It is useful for various industries, including industries involved in the production of plastics.

Why is Urea yet not under the Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme?

As per the latest news, the Indian Government is expected to include urea under the NBS before rolling out the Direct Cash Transfer (DCT) of urea subsidy in farmers' accounts. Soil health and size of landholdings will be considered to fix the subsidy rate of urea.

- In 2012, a Sharad Pawar Committee recommended to include urea under NBS.

- At present, the prices of Urea are controlled by the Government, which fixes the MRP.
- Urea Subsidy - As per the government definition, "The difference between the delivered cost of fertilizers at farm gate and net market realization by the urea units is given as subsidy to the urea manufacturer/importer by the Government of India."
- Urea is covered under the New Pricing Scheme.

12. Infrastructure Status for Convention Centres

Why in News

The Finance Ministry has granted '**Infrastructure**' status for **exhibition and convention centres**.

- In 2020, the government had added **affordable rental housing projects** to the list of sectors recognised as infrastructure.

Key Points

- **Infrastructure Status to Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre:**
 - Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre has been **included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors** by insertion of a new item **in the category of Social and Commercial Infrastructure**.
 - However, the benefits available as 'infrastructure' projects **would only be available** for projects with a minimum built-up floor area of 1,00,000 square metres of exclusive exhibition space or convention space or both combined.
 - This **includes primary facilities** such as exhibition centres, convention halls, auditoriums, plenary halls, business centres, meeting halls etc.
 - This move will **enable more such projects to come up across India's tourist destinations**.
- **Need for the Infrastructure Status:**
 - **India doesn't have large convention centres** or single halls with capacities to hold 7,000 to 10,000 people, **unlike countries like Thailand** that is a **major global MICE destination**.
 - Becoming a **MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) destination** can **generate significant revenue with several global companies active in India**.
- **Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors:**
 - The list is **notified by the Ministry of Finance** and included following categories:

- **Transport and Logistics:** Roads and bridges, Inland waterways, Airport, etc.
- **Energy:** Electricity Generation, Electricity Transmission, etc.
- **Water and Sanitation:** Solid Waste Management, Water treatment plants, etc.
- **Communication:** Telecommunication, etc.
- **Social and Commercial Infrastructure:** Education Institutions (capital stock), Sports Infrastructure, Hospitals (capital stock), Tourism infrastructure, etc.
- **Inclusion in the list** implies access to **concessional funds, promotion of projects and continuity of construction for the specified sub-sectors.**
- However, the infrastructure tag **now does not include vital tax breaks.**



GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1.E-Way Bill Integration with FASTag, RFID

Why in News

The Union Government has integrated the E-Way Bill (EWB) system with FasTag and RFID.

Key Points

- **Electronic Way (E-Way) Bill:**
 - **E-Way Bill** is usually a unique bill number generated for the specific consignment involving the movement of goods.
 - Under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** regime, **EWBs are mandatory** for inter-state transportation of goods valued over Rs. 50,000 from April 2018, with the exemption to precious items such as gold.
 - It is a mechanism **to ensure that goods being transported comply with the GST Law** and is a **tool to track movement of goods and check tax evasion.**
- **FASTag:**
 - The **FAS Tag** is a reloadable tag that **allows automatic deduction of toll** without having to stop for carrying out the cash transaction.
 - The tag uses **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** and is fixed on the windscreen of the vehicle once active.
 - RFID is the **use of radio waves to read and capture information** stored on a tag attached to an object.
 - A tag can be read from up to several feet away and does not need to be within the direct line-of-sight of the reader to be tracked.
 - From 15th February, 2021, **FASTag has become compulsory for all vehicles** across the country.
 - It is **operated by National Highway Authority of India (NHAI).**
- **Significance of Integration:**
 - **Large Movement of Goods Vehicles:** On an average, 25 lakh goods vehicle movements from more than 800 tolls are reported on a daily basis to the E-Way Bill system.

- **Live Vigilance:** The integration of EWB, RFID and FASTag will enable tax officers to undertake live vigilance in respect of EWB compliances by businesses.
 - Taxmen can now access reports on vehicles that have passed the selected tolls without e-way bills in the past few minutes.
- **Stop Revenue Leakage :** It will aid in preventing revenue leakage by real-time identification of cases of recycling and/or non-generation of EWBs.

2. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

Why in News

Setting up of 22 new regional AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) has been approved under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) so far.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - **Launch:**
 - PMSSY was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country.
 - **Nodal Ministry:**
 - Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
 - **Two Components:**
 - Setting up of AIIMS like institutions.
 - **Upgradation of government medical colleges** in various states.
 - The project cost for upgradation of each medical college institution is shared by the Centre and the state.
- **Other Initiatives Related to Healthcare Sector:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN)**
 - A single non-lapsable reserve fund for Health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess.
 - **PM Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Scheme:**
 - Announced in the **Union Budget 2021-22**.
 - **Aims** to develop capacities of primary, secondary, and tertiary care health systems even in the last miles of the nation, and developing a modern ecosystem for research, testing and treatment in the country itself.
 - **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):**

- The NDHM is a complete digital health ecosystem with four key features – **health ID, personal health records, Digi Doctor** and **health facility registry**.
- **Ayushman Bharat** (a two-pronged approach):
 - Creation of **health and wellness centres** to bring health care closer to homes.
 - The formulation of a **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)** to protect poor and vulnerable families against financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.
- **National Health Policy (NHP) 2017**:
 - Aims to **provide healthcare in an “assured manner” to all**, the NHP 2017 strives to address current and emerging challenges arising from the ever-changing socio-economic, technological and epidemiological scenarios.
- **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**
 - PMBJP stores have been set up to **provide generic drugs**, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
- **National Health Mission**:
 - NHM was launched by the government of India in **2013** subsuming the National Rural Health Mission and the National Urban Health Mission.
 - The main programmatic components include Health System Strengthening in rural and urban areas for - **Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A)**, and **Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases**.

3. Malerkotla: The 23rd District of Punjab

Why in News

Recently, the Punjab government has announced the formation of **Malerkotla** as the **23rd district of the state**.

- Section 5 of the **Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887** says the “State government may, by notification, vary the limits and alter the numbers of tehsils, districts and divisions into which the State is divided.”

Key Points

- **History of Malerkotla**:
 - The Malerkotla is former princely state and only **Muslim-dominated town of Punjab**.

- Historically, Malerkotla owes its foundations in the 15th century to **Sufi saint Sheikh Sadrauddin Sadar-i-Jahan**, also known as Haider Sheikh.
- **After the decline of the Mughal empire**, Malerkotla's rulers exercised greater independence and at the time of the invasion of India by **Ahmad Shah Abdali** from Afghanistan, they **aligned with him**.
 - Ahmed Shah Abdali **invaded India eight times from 1748 to 1767**.
- In 19th century, Malerkotla became one among the **cis-Sutlej states**.
- Malerkotla **continued under the British protection** and the alliance with the neighbouring Sikh states **till 1947** when it **became the only Muslim majority Sikh state** in East Punjab.
- After the dissolution of the princely states in 1948, **Malerkotla joined the new state of PEPSU** or Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). **PEPSU itself was dissolved in 1954** and Malerkotla became a part of Punjab.

Cis- Sutlej Sates

- The Cis-Sutlej states **were a group of small states in Punjab region in the 19th century**, lying between the Sutlej River on the north, the Himalayas on the east, the Yamuna River and Delhi District on the south, and Sirsa District on the west.
- The states were called **Cis- Sutlej by the British** because they were on the British, or southern, side of the Sutlej River.
- The Cis-Sutlej states **included Kaithal, Patiala, Jind, Thanesar, Malerkotla and Faridkot**.
- Under the threat of absorption into Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom, they appealed to the British, who established dominance over them by the **Treaty of Amritsar with Ranjit Singh (1809)**.
- The **states survived until the independence of India (1947)**, at which time they were organized into the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU).
- They subsequently were **absorbed into the Indian states of Punjab and Haryana**.
- **Malerkotla and the Sikh Community:**
 - **'Haa Da Naara' Episode (1705):**
 - Malerkotla Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan had raised his voice ('Haa Da Naara') against brutal execution of Chote Sahibzade (youngest sons of **Guru Gobind Singh** – Zorawar Singh (9) and Fateh Singh (6) – by Nawab of Sirhind, Wazir Khan in 1705.
 - **Gurdwara Haa da Naara Sahib was built in Malerkotla** to commemorate the voice raised by Sher Mohammad Khan.

- **Wadda Ghallugara (1762):** The Nawab Bhikam Shah fought on the side of Abdali's forces in a battle against the Sikhs in 1762.
 - The battle is known as 'Wadda Ghallugara' or the Great Holocaust where tens and thousands of Sikhs were killed.
- **Treaty of Friendship (1769):** In 1769, a treaty of friendship was signed with Raja Amar Singh of Patiala by the then Nawab of Malerkotla.
- **Namdhari Massacre (1872):** The British administration of Malerkotla (Punjab) was attacked by the contingents of Namdharis (a sect of Sikhs) under the leadership of Hira Singh and Lehna Singh, on 15th January, 1872.
 - The British Administration ordered that the Namdhari revolutionaries should be brought to the Parade Ground and blown up with cannons.
 - That ground as a symbol of martyrdom has been named now as 'Kukian Da Shaheedi Park'.

Creation of New District

- **Role of State:** The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State governments.
 - This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly.
 - Many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.
- **Purpose of Creation:** States argue that smaller districts lead to better administration and governance.
 - For example, in 2016, the Assam government issued a notification to upgrade the Majuli sub-division to Majuli district for "administrative expediency".
- **Role of Centre:** The Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones. States are free to decide.
 - **Role of Home Ministry:** The Home Ministry comes into the picture when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station.
 - The State government's request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry seeking clearance.
 - A **no-objection certificate** may be issued after examining their replies.
- **Number of Districts in India:**
 - According to the 2011 Census, there were 593 districts in the country.

- Between 2001-2011, as many as 46 districts were created by States.
- Though the **2021 Census** is yet to happen, **currently there are 718 districts in the country.**
- The surge in number is also due to **bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh** into A.P and Telangana in 2014.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4. Politicisation of Providing Security Cover

Context: The recent order by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for providing security cover to 77 MLAs of BJP who were elected earlier this month after the West Bengal Assembly poll is not only unprecedented but appears politically motivated.

Overstepping the norm

- In practice, decisions to provide security to persons under threat is taken by a committee in the MHA, which comprises officials from the Ministry, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Delhi Police and senior officials of the Central Armed Police Force.
- While the IB prepares the list of persons under threat and the degree of threat, the committee decides on the force to be deployed depending upon the place where the person is located.
- In these meetings, the threat perception of each of the person to be secured is discussed **one by one and not collectively for any group as such.**
- The threat perception for each of the persons (77 BJP MLAs) was not discussed thus giving rise to suspicions of political motivations.

Was such kind of blanket protection not provided before?

- In the past, such deployment of central forces for the protection of individuals was done in Punjab and in Jammu and Kashmir, when these regions were rocked by unrest & militancy.
- Since militants tried to sabotage the process of elections, poll candidates were generally targeted.
- The Central government, therefore, took blanket decisions to provide security to every candidate till the elections got over.

Implication of the present move

- **Unhealthy sign for Centre-State relations:** Law & order and protection to citizens including MLAs is the responsibility of State Police. But by deploying central forces, the Centre has sent a clear signal that it does not rely upon the State government to provide fool-proof security to the BJP MLAs.
- **Wrong signal to other police forces:** The Central government's distrust of officers who are considered close to a State's ruling dispensation does not bode well for police officers across the country.
- **Increased number of protected persons:** In 2019, as many as 66,043 police and CAPF personnel were deployed to protect 19,467 Ministers, Members of Parliament, judges and bureaucrats, against the sanctioned strength of 43,556 personnel
- **Impacts Training schedule:** Constant deployment of CAPF personnel on protection duties impacts their training schedule. After the initial eight-week training for VIP protection, the personnel have to undergo a two-week refresher training periodically to hone their skills.
- **Status Symbol:** Having security cover has now become a status symbol which doesn't bode well with democratic culture of society, where everyone is equal.

Way Ahead

- To curb the tendency of demanding security personnel around themselves, leaders and prominent persons should be asked to bear the expenditure,
- Members of Parliament and leaders with criminal records should be charged a fee for the security personnel deployed to protect them.

5. Single-Use Plastic

Why in News

Recently, a report was published which gave details of who makes **single-use plastic**, **130 million tons a year** at last count, and **who makes money from it**.

- The report was published by **Minderoo, a nonprofit organization** based in Australia along with **academics at the University of Oxford and the Stockholm Environment Institute**.

Key Points

- **Major Producers:**
 - Half of the world's single-use plastic is made by **20 big companies**.

- Two US companies followed by a Chinese-owned petrochemicals giant, and another one based in Bangkok.
- **Major Investors:**
 - Production is financed by **financial services companies including banks.**
 - Governments are also big stakeholders in this industry. About **40% of the largest single-use plastic makers are partly owned by governments, including China and Saudi Arabia.**
- **Growth:**
 - Single-use plastic has been a very good business, and that's projected to continue. In the **next five years alone, production capacity is forecast to grow by 30%.**
- **Usage:**
 - There's a huge disparity between richer and poorer nations:
 - An average **American uses and throws away 50 kilograms** of single-use plastic every year whereas an average **Indian uses less than one-twelfth of an American.**
- **Concerns:**
 - **Less Recycling:**
 - Only about **8% of plastic gets recycled in the US.** It is far **cheaper to make things out of newly produced plastic than from recycled plastic.**
 - **Limited Efforts:**
 - State and municipal governments have had success in banning certain items like plastic grocery bags, foam cups and drinking straws. But the **efforts focused on curtailing the production of single-use plastic have been limited so far.**
 - Advocacy efforts to persuade consumers to use less plastic **have failed to gain traction.**
- **Global Initiatives:**
 - **European Union** issued a directive calling for consumer brands to use at least 30% recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025.
- **Indian Initiatives:**
 - In 2019, the Union government in a bid to **free India of single-use plastics by 2022,** had **laid out a multi-ministerial plan** to discourage the use of single-use plastics across the country.
 - **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016** which extended the **responsibility to collect waste generated from the products** to their producers and brand owners.

Single-Use Plastics

- **About:**

- Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are **used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.**
 - These items are things like **plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.**
- Plastic is so **cheap and convenient** that it has replaced all other materials from the packaging industry but it **takes hundreds of years to disintegrate.**
 - It is a huge problem. If we look at the data, out of **9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste generated every year** in our country, **43% is single use plastic.**
- **Uses:**
 - The single-use plastic products also **prevent the spread of infection.**
 - Instruments such as **syringes, applicators, drug tests, bandages and wraps are often made to be disposable.**
 - Also, single-use plastic products have been **enlisted in the fight against food waste**, keeping food and water fresher for longer and **reducing the potential for contamination.**
- **Problems:**
 - **Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable** and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
 - In the process of breaking down, **it releases toxic chemicals** (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which **make their way into our food and water supply.**

Way Forward

- Economically **affordable and ecologically viable alternatives** which will not burden the resources are needed and their prices will also come down with time and increase in demand.
 - Need to **promote alternatives** like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.
 - More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for it, are needed to **look for sustainably viable options.**
- Citizens have to bring **behavioural change** and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Blue Mormon is the state butterfly of:

- Karnataka
- Tamil Nadu
- Maharashtra
- Andhra Pradesh

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Blue Mormon is the state butterfly of Maharashtra.

2. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- Jhum: India
- Roca: Brazil
- Ladang: Myanmar
- Milpa: Mexico

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Shifting Cultivation is known as Ladang in Indonesia, Caingin in Philippines, Milpa in central America & Mexico, Ray in Vietnam, Taungya In Myanmar, Tamrai in Thailand, Chena in Sri Lanka, Conuco in Venezuela, Roca in Brazil, Masole in central Africa.
- In India, it is known by various local names. Most common among these is 'Jhum' cultivation.

3. Consider the following statements regarding 'Azad Pattan hydel power project':

- It is being built on the Indus river.
- It is a part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A 1 only
B 2 only

- C Both 1 and 2
D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : B

Explanation

- Pakistan and China have signed an agreement for the 700 MW **Azad Pattan hydel power project on the Jhelum river** in Sudhnoti district of **Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK)**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.
 - The 1.5-billion USD project is under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- The **Azad Pattan project** is one of five hydropower schemes on the Jhelum, the other four are Mahl, Kohala, Chakothi Hattian and Karot projects.
 - **Azad Pattan, Kohala and Karot** are being developed under the CPEC framework. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.

4. The News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020 is associated with which of the following country?

- a. Australia
- b. Canada
- c. France
- d. U.S.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Under Australia's News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020, tech and social media giants such as Facebook and Google will have to pay local news outlets for using their content.
- The Australian law would force Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google to reach commercial deals with Australian publishers or face compulsory arbitration.

5. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Einsteinium?

1. It was discovered as a component of the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion in 1952.
2. It is exceptionally radioactive.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Einsteinium is an element with the symbol Es and atomic number 99.
- Einsteinium is a member of the actinide series. Einsteinium was discovered as a component of the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion in 1952.
- It is exceptionally radioactive.
- Recently, chemists have studied and characterised its properties in the lab.

6. In which of the following multilateral organizations are both India and Maldives both members?

1. SAARC
2. Commonwealth of Nations
3. Indian Ocean Regional Association

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Maldives is a part of the Indian Ocean Regional Association and also the SAARC.
- The Maldives also rejoined the Commonwealth in February 2020, three years after it quit the organisation.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. In the effort to secure a global consensus around this target, India must first “green” its fossil fuel energy basket. This can be done by increasing the share of natural gas. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the context of net zero carbon emissions targets.
- Discuss how natural gas can act as a suitable transition option for India.
- Conclude suitably.

2Q. Corporate social responsibility envisages ethical corporate governance. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly defining the concept of Corporate social responsibility.
- Discuss Corporate social responsibility & Corporate Governance linkage.
- Conclude Suitably.