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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Deep purple from Odisha

- The Koraput traditional agriculture was accorded the **Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) status in 2012.**
 - Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) are outstanding landscapes of aesthetic beauty that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage. Located in specific sites around the world, they sustainably provide multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security for millions of small-scale farmers.
 - GIAHS status helps to promote public understanding, awareness about sustainable agriculture and to safeguard the social, cultural, economic and environmental goods and services that provide to family farmers, smallholders, indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) was started by the **Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)**, an agency of the United Nations.
- The other recognised GIAHS sites in India include the following:
 - **Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming System** of Kerala.
 - **Pampore Saffron Heritage** of Kashmir.

2. The AIDS fight offers a COVID vaccine patent pathway

Background:

- Universal vaccination is a necessity to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To achieve global herd immunity and prevent new strains of COVID-19 from emerging, vaccines need to be affordable and available in massive quantities throughout the globe.
- The lack of technical know-how and the limited capacity of the current manufacturers to scale up their production capacities have led to **massive vaccine shortage globally**. The **strict intellectual rights regime** is also a hurdle for large scale manufacturing of the vaccines.

Details:

- The article discusses some of the ways to overcome the patents hurdle to help scale up the global vaccine production.

Temporary waiver of patents rights:

- **India and South Africa have called for a temporary waiver of the TRIPS provisions of the WTO.** Such a waiver would allow the pharmaceutical companies in the developing countries to manufacture the vaccines without the threat of legal actions by the original patent holders.
 - The TRIPS does have such a provision in the event of a **public health emergency**.
- However experts have raised concerns over the effectiveness of such a policy.

Compulsory licensing:

- The government can also issue what are called “compulsory licenses” which **override patent rights to allow local production or import of drugs by generic manufacturers in the event of a public health crisis.**
- The provision of compulsory licensing has been enshrined in the **Doha Declaration addendum** to the WTO’s TRIPS agreement.
- The Doha addendum, Section 5c, offers AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as examples of what qualifies as a health emergency. Given the health crisis brought out by COVID-19 it could easily qualify as a health emergency.

The COVAX option:

- The COVAX programme established to **purchase vaccine doses and donate them to low-income countries** can play a critical role in ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccines. Also importantly this would not involve modifying the existing patent rights and is bound to face less opposition from any section.
- However, the **gross underfunding of the COVAX programme** poses serious challenges. According to the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the people in the lowest-income countries might have to wait until 2022 to get vaccinated through the COVAX programme.
- Similar ventures during the AIDS crisis were also plagued by the issue of chronic underfunding and hence had only minor effects on that pandemic.

Patent sharing pool:

- A patent-sharing pool for COVID products, the **COVID-19 Technology Access Pool** was proposed at the last meeting of the WTO. The **UN Medicines Patent Pool** has also been opened up to accept voluntary licences for COVID-19 vaccines and medicines.

- The companies which place their products in this list would allow other manufacturers to pursue the production of such products without fear of prosecution over IPR infringement.
- However, so far, **no patent holders have joined these efforts.**

Voluntary licensing:

- In this the **patent owners voluntarily license their products to other producer companies** who are experienced at mass-producing low-cost medications. Such licences require the licensee to pay the IP holder **some amount of royalty amount** on the sales of the drug.
- Previous experience with respect to the HIV/AIDS pandemic demonstrates that it is possible to navigate the existing patent restrictions through the use of voluntary licensing mechanism.
 - Major manufacturers like Gilead placed licensing agreements to produce AIDS drugs for which they owned patent rights in the UN-affiliated Medicines Patent Pool.
 - This helped the Indian pharmaceutical sector **take up production of critical HIV/AIDS drugs on a larger scale** and this helped make treatments for AIDS more affordable in low-income countries and helped mitigate that pandemic.
 - Voluntary licensing agreements between pharmaceutical producers were able to bring down the price of AIDS medications despite the stringent TRIPS regulations.
- Voluntary licensing has been a largely neglected aspect of the current efforts to overcome the IP hurdles to vaccine production.

Significance:

- Generally manufacturers prefer to work with voluntary licences because there is **more good will between the licensor and the licensee companies**, while compulsory licences often result in a legal battle brought up by the patent holder.
- Voluntary licences also **enable production to begin more expeditiously** as they usually are **accompanied by “technology transfer”**. Thus the licensee company will not have to spend less effort and time to figure out how to reverse engineer the product.
- The loyalty paid to the licensor but at low rates ensure that there is a **fine balance between the right to health of people in poor countries and the financial flows of the licensor company.**

Recommendations:

- The United Nations' Medicines Patent Pool and the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool can be important tools in the effort to promote voluntary licensing for COVID products.

Conclusion:

- Patents should not be considered as ironclad ownership rights. They are but a temporary contract that balances the public interest with the claims of the innovator and that too in normal times.
- Given the **urgent global health crisis**, all possible options should be used to overcome the IP hurdle to ensure large scale vaccine production.
- This is important not just from the view point of **social justice** by ensuring that life-saving therapies are available to the world's poor, but is also equally important to **curtail the further mutation of the coronavirus** into more deadly, contagious and possibly vaccine-resistant variants.

3. Clashes erupt in East Jerusalem after ceasefire comes into effect

Context:

- Israel and Hamas have agreed to a **ceasefire**.

Background:

- The 11 days of rocket attacks from Gaza based Hamas and the retaliatory airstrikes by Israel had resulted in a loss of lives on both sides apart from the damage to buildings and other infrastructure.
- Over the last few days, there had been a growing call for a ceasefire. **In the UNSC, most countries, including India, backed an immediate ceasefire.** The U.S. administration, which had been supportive of Israel's right to self-defence had also been pressing for a significant de-escalation lately.

Details:

- Amid international pressure, the Israeli Security Cabinet unanimously accepted a "unilateral and mutual" ceasefire with Hamas and Hamas immediately confirmed the truce.
- The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been mediated by Egypt.

Concerns:

- Though the ceasefire appears to be holding, there continue to be grave risks for further escalation.

- Militarily, Hamas, despite the heavy losses it suffered, demonstrated its growing rocket fire capabilities. This does not augur well for peace in the region.
- The two sides have propounded different lines on the truce deal.
- The **Sheikh Jarrah issue** is complicated, where Palestinians face eviction from their houses. The Supreme Court of Israel is supposed to give a final ruling on the eviction of Palestinians in the neighbourhood. If Israel goes ahead with the eviction process, there could be more protests and violence.
- The continuing riots between Jewish vigilantes and Arab mobs and the increasing protests in the West Bank continue to be a cause of concern.

Israel Palestine Conflict History

To understand the present-day ongoing bloody conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is necessary to understand the background of the place and the people associated with it. Although the present conflict has its roots in the 20th century, a brief background of the region with respect to ancient history will help one understand the religious and historical significance of the place, especially to the chief stakeholders in the conflict.

- Israel today is a small country in West Asia, about the size of one of India's northeastern states, Meghalaya or Manipur.
- Israel is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to its west, Egypt to the south, Jordan and Syria to its east and Lebanon to the north.
- Israel has many sites that are of religious significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike and has a complex history.
- Today, the population of Israel is mostly Jewish, though there are minorities of Christians and Muslims.

4. Pandemic has made countries more self-seeking: Jaishankar

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has spoken about **COVID induced anxieties and their impact on international relations**.
- The speech by the minister noted that the pandemic had prompted countries to become more self-seeking and renege on their commitments, block supply chain and logistics to cater to their own domestic demand while also leveraging their capabilities to create shortages for strategic purposes or to gain financially. This had led to **countries prioritising self-interest and national security**.
- This the minister noted is in stark contrast to the pre-pandemic phase wherein **globalization emphasized global exchanges based on economic efficiency**.

- The minister emphasized the need for **manufacturing security** to hedge against excessive international dependency.
- The speech is being interpreted as an admission by the Minister to the problems that India itself is facing in continuing with **the Vaccine Maitri project**, under which it had promised to deliver vaccines all over the world and especially to the South Asian partner countries.

5. 80 of Odisha tribal group test positive

- The **Dongria Kondh** tribe is a **particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG)** living in the Niyamgiri hill range of Odisha.
- There are 75 PVTGs in India with **Odisha housing 13 of them (max for any state in India)**.

Context:

- A sudden spike of COVID-19 positive cases is being reported among the Dongria Kondh tribe.

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.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Fitful approach

Context:

- The Central government has recently sent a notice to messaging service provider **WhatsApp** to withdraw its **updated privacy policy**.
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has sought a response from WhatsApp within seven days.

Background:

- WhatsApp, in early 2021, updated its privacy policy.
- There had been an intense backlash against the decision to update its privacy policy, following which it was forced to postpone the implementation date.

7. SC: personal guarantors liable for corporate debt

Context:

- The **Supreme Court has upheld the legal validity of the government notification** allowing financial creditors, to initiate insolvency proceedings against personal guarantors of stressed corporate entities under the Indian Bankruptcy and Insolvency Code (IBC).

Background:

- The central government had released a notification in November 2019 allowing **lenders to initiate insolvency proceedings against personal guarantors along with the stressed corporate entities** for whom they gave guarantee.
- This was challenged before several High Courts by a group of petitioners, mostly personal guarantors to stressed companies.

- Given the multiple appeals in different High Courts, the Supreme Court had transferred the petitions from the High Courts to itself on a request from the government.

Salient aspects of the judgement:

- The bench noted an **“intrinsic connection”** between personal guarantors and their corporate debtors and hence the need to **hold the personal guarantors accountable too**.
 - The personal guarantors are usually promoters of big business houses.
- The Court also noted that the intimate connection between the personal guarantors and their corporate debtors necessitates a **common forum for adjudication under the IBC**.
 - Section 60(2) of the Code requires the bankruptcy proceedings of corporate debtors and their personal guarantors to be held before a common forum – the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)**.
- The Court has clarified that the discharge of a principal borrower from the debt by operation of law, or due to liquidation or insolvency proceeding, does not absolve the guarantor of his or her liability thus implying that the **liability of the guarantor is not co-extensive with that of the corporate debtor**.

Significance of the judgement:

More effective outcomes:

- Involving the personal guarantors in the liquidation process will also facilitate the Committee of Creditors to **frame realistic resolution or liquidation plans**, keeping in mind the prospect of realising some part of the creditors’ dues from personal guarantors.
- A common forum for adjudication will help the NCLT have a better overview of the case and hence will aid in **more effective verdicts at the appellate stage**.
- The judgement is expected to **boost banks’ recovery efforts involving bad loans**. The inclusion of the guarantors in insolvency proceedings would push the guarantors to arrange for the payment of the debt to the creditor bank in order to obtain a quick discharge from insolvency proceedings.

Rectifying a loophole in the IBC framework:

- The personal guarantors and related parties in some insolvency cases had been able to escape insolvency proceedings against them despite indications of **collusion between the borrowers and the guarantors**. This judgement will now help rectify such a loophole in the IBC.

8. RBI to pay Rs. 99,122 cr. surplus to Centre

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India's board has approved a transfer of significantly higher-than-expected surplus to the government for the July-March accounting period.

Details:

- The RBI announced a surplus transfer of Rs. 99,122 crore for the 9-month period from July 2020 to March 2021. The government had budgeted to receive a surplus of about Rs. 50,000 crore from the RBI to be accounted for in the budget estimates for 2021/22.
 - **The bank will be moving to an April to March accounting year from 2021/22, from the current July to June year.**
- The surplus reflects the central bank's **income from its open market operations as well as receipts from foreign reserve sales.**
- The RBI maintains a **Contingency Risk Buffer at 5.50% in line with recommendations of the Bimal Jalan Committee report** and transfers the surplus to the government.

Economic challenges to the government:

- Though the higher-than-expected dividend or surplus transfer by the RBI is a welcome relief to the government, it may still **not be sufficient to meet the revenue estimates of the government** for the current year.

COVID to hit tax revenue:

- The lockdowns in several states have resulted in **subduing the economic activities** and this is going to result in a **significant drop in GST revenues** anticipated in May and June of 2021.
- **The high commodity prices fuelling inflation, despite the lower demand would only dent the margins of corporates** in many sectors, compressing the growth in direct tax collections as well.

Difficult disinvestment target:

- The government is likely to find it challenging to meet its **privatisation and disinvestment target of \$24 billion** given the high degree of uncertainty surrounding the second wave and lack of interest by the private players.

Cut in public expenditure:

- The lower than expected revenue inflow may pressurize the government to cut public expenditure. The lowering of public expenditure, especially when it is a necessity to spend to spur investment and growth would prove detrimental to the Indian economy both in the shorter as well as the longer term.

Disrupted economic recovery:

- The economic growth rates have hit record low levels last year and the **second wave has only dented the economic recovery.**

9. A green warrior to the core is no more

- **Well-known environmentalist and Gandhian Sunderlal Bahuguna** has passed away.

About Sunderlal Bahuguna:

- Bahuguna was a pioneer of the Chipko Movement, which was a socio-ecological movement that aimed at resisting mass deforestation using Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance and Satyagraha.
- Early in his life, he was involved in the freedom movement and later in the Sarvodaya Movement of Vinoba Bhave.
- He was most known for the Chipko Movement, chiefly in the Gharwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand, which involved hugging trees to protect them from being chopped off for commercial purposes.
- Starting in the 1970s, the movement spread to other parts of the country and saw participation from community leaders and also women in large numbers.
- He gave the world the message that ecology and economy should go together.
- As a result of his appeal to the then PM Indira Gandhi, she ordered a 15-year ban on the chopping of green trees in 1980.
- In 1981, he refused to accept the Padma Shri award due to the government refusing to cancel the Tehri dam project.
- In 2009, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan.

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Kyasanur Forest Disease

Why in News

A **new point-of-care test** has been found to be highly sensitive in the rapid diagnosis of **Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)**.

- This disease is also known as **monkey fever**.

Key Points

- **Point-of-care Test:**
 - **About:**
 - It is developed by **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)-National Institute of Virology**.
 - It includes a **battery-operated Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) analyser**, which is a portable, lightweight and universal cartridge-based sample pre-treatment kit and nucleic acid extraction device that aid in sample processing at the point of care.
 - **Benefits:**
 - It would be beneficial for the **diagnosis of KFD** as the outbreaks mainly happen in remote areas, where there is lack of well-equipped sample handling and laboratory testing facilities.
 - It would be useful in **quick patient management and controlling further spread of the virus**.
- **Kyasanur Forest Disease:**
 - **About:**
 - It is caused by **Kyasanur Forest disease Virus (KFDV)**, which primarily affects **humans and monkeys**.
 - It was **first identified in 1957** in a sick monkey from the **Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka**. Since then, between 400-500 human cases per year have been reported.
 - Eventually, KFD emerged as a grave public health problem spreading through the **entire Western Ghats**.
 - **Transmission:**

- In nature, the virus is maintained mainly in **hard ticks (Haemaphysalis spinigera), monkeys, rodents and birds.**
- To **humans**, it may occur after a **tick bite or contact with an infected animal (a sick or recently dead monkey).**
- **Symptoms:**
 - Characterised by **chills, frontal headache, body ache, and high fever** for five to 12 days with a case fatality rate of 3 to 5%.
- **Diagnosis:**
 - Diagnosis can be made in the early stage of illness by molecular detection by PCR or virus isolation from blood.
 - Later, serologic testing using **Enzyme-linked Immunosorbent Serologic Assay (ELISA)** can be performed.
- **Treatment and Prevention:**
 - There is **no specific treatment** for monkey fever.
 - A **vaccine (Formalin inactivated KFDV vaccine)** does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India.
 - However, it is found that vaccines are not effective once the person is infected with fever.

2. Six Sites in Tentative List of World Heritage Sites

Why in News

Recently, **six Indian places** have been **added to the tentative list of UNESCO's** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) **world heritage sites.**

- The submissions were made by **Archaeological Survey of India**, which is responsible for the **conservation and preservation** of Indian monuments.

Key Points

- **Tentative List:**
 - As per **Operational Guidelines, 2019** of UNESCO, it is mandatory to put any monument/site on the **Tentative List (TL)** for **one year** before it is considered for the final **nomination dossier.**
 - Once the **nomination** is done, it is sent to the **World Heritage Centre (WHC).**
 - India has **48 sites** in the TL as of now.
- **World Heritage Site:**
 - **Any of various areas or objects inscribed** on the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List.**

- The sites are designated as having “**outstanding universal value**” under the **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972**.
 - The **World Heritage Centre is the Secretariat** to the 1972 Convention.
- It provides a **framework for international cooperation** in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world.
- **There are three types of sites:** Cultural, Natural, and Mixed.
 - **Cultural heritage** sites include hundreds of historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental **sculpture or painting**.
 - **Natural heritage sites** are restricted to those natural areas that have excellent ecological and evolutionary processes, unique natural phenomena, habitats of rare or endangered species etc.
 - **Mixed heritage sites** contain elements of both natural and cultural significance.
- India has **38 world heritage sites, including 30 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site**. The latest one included is **Jaipur city, Rajasthan**.
- **About New Six Places in TL:**
 - **Satpura Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh):**
 - Home to 26 species of the Himalayan region including reptiles, and 42 species of Nilgiri areas. It is the **largest tiger-occupied forest** and also has the **largest tiger population**.
- **Ghats of Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh):**
 - The ghats date back to the **14th century** but most were rebuilt, along with Varanasi, in the **18th century** by Maratha rulers.
 - They have special significance in **Hindu mythology**, and are **primarily used for bathing and Hindu religious rituals**.
- **Megalithic Site of Hire Benkal (Karnataka):**
 - This **2,800-years-old megalithic site is one of the largest prehistoric megalithic settlements** where some funerary monuments are still intact.
 - The granite structures are **burial monuments** that may also have served many **ritual purposes**. Due to the **extremely valuable collection of Neolithic monuments**, the site was proposed for recognition.
- **Maratha Military Architecture in Maharashtra:**

- There are **12 forts** in Maharashtra dating back to the era of the **17th century** Maratha king Chhatrapati **Shivaji**. They are **Shivneri, Raigad, Torna, Rajgad, Salher-Mulher, Panhala, Pratapgad, Lohagad, Sindhudurg, Padmadurga, Vijaydurg and Kolaba**.
- These forts offer new insight in various forms of architecture including rock cut features, construction of perimeter walls in layers on hill tops and slopes, temples, palaces, markets, residential areas, and almost every form of medieval architecture.

□ **Bhedaghat-Lametaghat in Narmada Valley- Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh):**

- **Bhedaghat**, referred to as the **Grand Canyon of India**, is a town in the **Jabalpur district**.
- It is known for its **marble rocks** and their various **morphological forms** on either side of the Narmada river which flows through the gorge.
- Several **dinosaur fossils** have been found in the **Narmada valley**, particularly in the Bhedaghat-Lameta Ghat area of Jabalpur.
- **River Narmada** narrows down on its way **through marble rocks** and plunges in a waterfall giving out the **appearance** of a **smoke cascade**.

Temples of Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu):

- Kanchipuram is known for its spirituality, serenity, and silk.
- It is **situated on the banks of River Vegavathi**.
- This historical city once had **1,000 temples**, of which **only 126** (108 Shaiva and 18 Vaishnava) now remain.
- Its rich legacy has been the endowment of the **Pallava dynasty**, which made the region its capital between the 6th and 7th centuries and lavished upon its architectural gems that are a fine example of **Dravidian** styles.

3. BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) Meeting

Why in News

Recently, India virtually hosted the **7th meeting** of the **BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG)** under the **Science, Technology, and Innovation track** of the **BRICS 2021**.

- The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, and **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** coordinated the meeting.

Key Points

- **BRICS:**

- **BRICS** is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**.
- In **2001**, the **British Economist Jim O'Neill** coined the term BRIC to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
 - The grouping was **formalised** during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers' in **2006**.
 - **South Africa** was invited to join **BRIC in December 2010**, after which the group adopted the acronym **BRICS**.
- **India** has assumed the **BRICS Presidency** from **January 2021**.
- **Structure:**
 - **BRICS does not exist in the form of organization**, but it is an **annual summit** between the **supreme leaders of five nations**.
 - The **Chairmanship** of the forum is **rotated annually** among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- **Cooperation Mechanism:** Cooperation among members is achieved through:
 - **Track I:** Formal diplomatic engagement between the national governments.
 - **Track II:** Engagement through government-affiliated institutions, e.g. state-owned enterprises and business councils.
 - **Track III:** Civil society and People-to-People engagement.
- **Areas of Cooperation:**
 - **Economic Cooperation:**
 - Agreements have been concluded in the areas of Economic and Trade Cooperation; Innovation Cooperation, Customs Cooperation; strategic cooperation between the BRICS Business Council, Contingent Reserve Agreement and the **New Development Bank**.
 - **People-to-People Exchange:**
 - This seeks to forge new friendships; deepen relations and mutual understanding between BRICS peoples in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, diversity and mutual learning.
 - Such People to people exchanges include the **Young Diplomats Forum, Parliamentarian Forum, Trade Union Forum, Civil BRICS** as well as the **Media Forum**.
 - **Political and Security Cooperation:**
 - This is aimed at achieving peace, security, development and cooperation for a more equitable and fair world.
 - BRICS is utilised as a driver for South Africa's foreign policy priorities including the pursuit of the African Agenda and South-South Cooperation.
- **About BRICS Astronomy Working Group:**

- It provides a platform for BRICS member countries to collaborate in the field of **astronomy**, recommending that the focal points in each country **should present the scientific results of the work being carried out in each country.**
- This will **help seek funding support** to realize the flagship project whenever funding opportunities are announced by BRICS funding agencies.
- At the **meeting**, the members indicated future directions of research in this area such as building network of intelligent telescope and data network, study of transient astronomical phenomena in universe, **big data, artificial intelligence**, machine learning application to process the voluminous data generated now a days due to enhance multi-wavelength telescope observatory.

Way Forward

- BRICS did well in its first decade to identify issues of common interests and to create platforms to address these issues.
- For BRICS to remain relevant over the next decade, each of its members must make a realistic assessment of the initiative's opportunities and inherent limitations.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4.Increased Subsidy on DAP

Why in News

Recently, the government has **increased the subsidy to 140% on Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertiliser** in order to retain the selling price for farmers at the current level.

- Recently, the international prices of phosphoric acid, ammonia etc. used in DAP have gone up by 60% to 70%.

Key Points

- **About Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP):**
 - DAP is the **second most commonly used fertiliser in India after urea.**

- Farmers normally apply this fertiliser just before or at the beginning of sowing, as it is **high in phosphorus (P) that stimulates root development**.
- DAP (46% P, 18% Nitrogen) is the preferred source of Phosphorus for farmers. This is **similar to urea**, which is their **preferred nitrogenous fertiliser** containing 46% N.
- **About Subsidy Scheme for Fertilisers:**
 - Under the **current scheme**, the **MRP of Urea is fixed but the subsidy can vary** while **MRP of DAP is decontrolled (i.e subsidy is fixed but the MRP can vary)**.
 - All **Non-Urea based fertilisers** are regulated under **Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme**.
- **About Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) Regime:**
 - Under the NBS regime – **fertilizers are provided to the farmers at the subsidized rates based on the nutrients (N, P, K & S) contained in these fertilizers**.
 - Also, the fertilizers which are **fortified with secondary and micronutrients** such as molybdenum (Mo) and zinc are **given additional subsidy**.
 - The **subsidy on Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers is announced by the Government on an annual basis** for each nutrient on a per kg basis – which are determined **taking into account** the international and domestic prices of P&K fertilizers, **exchange rate**, inventory level in the country etc.
 - NBS policy intends to increase the consumption of P&K fertilizers so that **optimum balance (N:P:K= 4:2:1) of NPK fertilization** is achieved.
 - This would improve soil health and as a result the yield from the crops would increase, resulting in enhanced income to the farmers.
 - Also, as the government expects rational use of fertilizers, this would also ease off the burden of fertilizer subsidy.
 - It is **being implemented** from April 2010 by the Department of Fertilizers, **Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers**.
- **Issues Related to NBS:**
 - **Imbalance in Price of Fertilisers:**
 - Urea is left-out in the scheme and hence it remains under price control as NBS has been implemented only in other fertilizers.
 - There is an imbalance as the price of fertilizers (other than urea) – which were decontrolled have gone up from 2.5 to four times during the 2010-2020 decade.
 - However, since 2010, the price of urea has increased only by 11%. This has led to farmers using more urea than before, which has further worsened fertilizer imbalance.

- **Costs on Economy and Environment :**
 - Fertilizer subsidy is the **second-biggest subsidy after food subsidy**, the NBS policy is not only damaging the fiscal health of the economy but also proving detrimental to the soil health of the country.
- **Black Marketing : Subsidised urea** is getting diverted to bulk buyers/traders or even **non-agricultural users** such as plywood and animal feed makers.
 - It is being **smuggled** to neighbouring countries like **Bangladesh and Nepal**.
- **Implications of Increasing the Subsidy on DAP :**
 - As farmers will start sowing operations for **Kharif Crops**, it is highly important for them to get the fertilisers at subsidised rate so as to keep **inflation** at check.
 - Politically, too, to turn down the **farmer protests**, during the time of the **Covid's second wave**, is the last thing the government would want.

5. International Day for Biological Diversity

Why in News

The **International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB)** (International Biodiversity day) is observed on **22nd May** every year.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** in 1993 proclaimed **22nd May** as IDB to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues.
 - The UNGA also declared the period **2011-2020** as the **United Nations (UN) Decade on Biodiversity** to promote the implementation of a strategic plan on biodiversity and its overall vision of living in harmony with nature.
 - It also declared **2021-2030** as the **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development** and the **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**.
- **2021 Theme:**
 - This year's theme is **"We're part of the solution"** which is a continuation of **2020 theme- Our solutions are in nature**.
 - This serves as a reminder that **biodiversity remains the answer to several sustainable development challenges**.

- **Some Global Initiatives to Save Biodiversity:**
 - **Convention on Biological Diversity:**
 - It is a **legally binding treaty** to conserve biodiversity that has been in force since 1993.
 - **India is a party** to the convention.
 - **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora:**
 - It provides public, private and **non-governmental organisations** with the knowledge and tools that **enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.**
 - **India is a member** of the convention.

Biodiversity

- **About:**
 - It is a term used to describe the **enormous variety of life on Earth**. It can be used more specifically to refer to all of the species in one region or ecosystem. Biodiversity refers to **every living thing, including plants, bacteria, animals, and humans.**
 - It is often understood in terms of the wide variety of plants, animals and microorganisms, but it also **includes genetic differences within each species.**
- **Concerns:**
 - **World Wide Fund for Nature** in its flagship **Living Planet Report 2020** warned that **global biodiversity is in steep decline.**
 - It has revealed a **global species loss of 68% in less than 50 years, a catastrophic decline never seen before.**
- **Need for Conservation:**
 - It **boosts ecosystem productivity** where each species, no matter how small, all have an important role to play.
 - A **larger number of plant species means a greater variety of crops.** Greater species diversity ensures natural sustainability for all life forms.
 - The world should conserve it so as to **maintain the food chain.** The **disturbance in the food chain may affect the whole ecosystem.**
- **Some Indian Initiatives For Conservation of Biodiversity:**
 - **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems.**
 - **Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017.**
 - **The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.**
 - **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.**

Other Important Initiatives

- 5th June: World Environment Day
- 22nd March: World Water Day
- 22nd April: Earth Day
- Last Saturday of March: Earth Hour

6. Sunderlal Bahuguna: Chipko Movement

Why in News

Recently, **Sunderlal Bahuguna**, the Gandhian who was the driving force behind the **Chipko movement** died due to **Covid-19**.

Key Points

- **Chipko Movement:**
 - It was a **non-violent agitation** which originated in Uttar Pradesh's **Chamoli district** (now Uttarakhand) in **1973**.
 - The name of the movement '**chipko**' comes from the word '**embrace**', as the **villagers hugged the trees** and encircled them to prevent being hacked.
 - It is best remembered for the **collective mobilisation of women** for the cause of preserving forests, which also brought about a change in attitude regarding their own status in society.
 - It's biggest victory was **making people aware of their rights to forests**, and **how grassroots activism can influence policy-making** regarding ecology and shared natural resources.
 - It led to a **ban on commercial felling of trees above 30 degrees slope** and above 1,000 msl (mean sea level) in **1981**.
- **Sunderlal Bahuguna (1927-2021):**
 - **Initiated the chipko movement to guard the trees on the Himalayan slopes.**
 - Known for coining the Chipko slogan '**ecology is permanent economy**'
 - After the Chipko movement in the 1970s, he **gave the message across the globe that ecology and ecosystem are more important**. He was of the opinion that **ecology and economy should go together**.
 - **Campaigned against the Tehri Dam on River Bhagirathi**, a mega-project with devastating consequences. He undertook one of **India's longest fasts after Independence, over 56 days**.
 - Took **4,800 km Kashmir to Kohima padayatra (foot march)** in the early 1980s to bring attention to the entire Himalayan region.

- Supported **women-led movements** against the liquor mafia in the hills, and for the **Beej Bachao Andolan**, a movement to save Himalayan agricultural biodiversity from being wiped out by the unsustainable, **chemical-intensive Green Revolution**.
- He was awarded the **Padma Vibhushan in 2009**.



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Recombinant DNA technology (Genetic Engineering) allows genes to be transferred

1. across different species of plants
2. from animals to plants
3. from microorganisms to higher organisms

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Genetic Engineering or Recombinant DNA technology allows selected individual genes to be transferred from one organism into another, also between nonrelated species.
- It allows genes to be transferred across different species of plants, from animals to plants and from microorganisms to higher organisms.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Oman is bounded by Yemen in the northwest and Arabian Sea in the east.
2. The Musandam Peninsula is Oman's territory located between the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

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

- **Oman is bounded to the southwest by Yemen, to the south and east by the Arabian Sea, to the north by the Gulf of Oman, to the northwest by the United Arab Emirates, and to the west by Saudi Arabia. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- **The Musandam Peninsula locally known as Ruus Al Jibal is a peninsula that forms the northeastern point of the Arabian Peninsula. It is located to the south of the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - It is mainly governed by Oman as the Musandam Governorate with certain parts governed by the United Arab Emirates, including Ras Al Khaimah and parts of Dibba.

3. Consider the following statements regarding National Institute of Social Defence (NISD):

1. It is an Autonomous Body registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
2. It is a central advisory body to the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- **The National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) is an Autonomous Body and is registered under Societies Registration Act of 1860 with the Government of National Capital Territory (NCT), Delhi. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - It is a central advisory body for the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (and not the Ministry of Women and Child Development)**. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.
 - It is the nodal training and research institute in the field of social defence.
- It currently focuses on human resource development in the areas of drug abuse prevention, welfare of senior citizens, beggary prevention, transgender and other social defence issues.

4. Consider the following statements regarding the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

1. The act declared transgender persons as the third gender.
2. The act established the National Council for Transgender persons.

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

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- The **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** declared that a transgender person is one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes transmen and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra.
 - In the case **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India, 2014**, the Supreme Court declared **transgender people to be a 'third gender'**. Hence, **statement 1 is not correct**.
- The act provides the right of residence with parents and immediate family members.
 - It prohibits discrimination against a transgender person in various sectors such as education, employment, and healthcare etc.
- The **act established the National Council for Transgender persons**. It functions under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Hence, **statement 2 is correct**.

5. Consider the following statements:

1. Tropical cyclones have much more intense rainfall than temperate cyclones.
2. Tropical cyclones are surrounded by closed isobars, the isobars of a temperate cyclone are generally elongated.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Tropical cyclones have much more intense rainfall than temperate cyclones.
- Tropical cyclones are surrounded by closed isobars, the isobars of a temperate cyclone are generally elongated.
- While the velocity of wind in a tropical cyclone is much higher and more damaging, the velocity of air in a temperate cyclone is comparatively lower.

6. Which of the following statements about pardoning powers of the Governor is/are correct?

1. The Governor can pardon, reprieve, respite, remit, suspend or commute a death sentence.
2. Governor does not have the power to pardon the sentence inflicted by a court-martial on the convict.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Unlike the President of India, the Governor does not have the power to pardon a death sentence.
- A governor can reprieve, respite, remit, suspend or commute a death sentence.
- Governor does not have the power to pardon the sentence inflicted by a court-martial on the convict.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Examine Kautilya's ideas on governance and corruption. How far are these ideas relevant in today's Indian society. (250 words)

Approach

- Discuss Kautilya's ideas on governance and corruption.
- Discuss their relevance in contemporary times.

2Q. Foreign companies dragging India to international arbitration not only leads to financial loss but also damages the reputation of the country as an investment destination. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Give facts related to foreign companies dragging India to international arbitration.
- Elaborate on reasons for increasing international arbitration and its impact, as well as steps taken by government to deal with the problem.
- Give conclusion.