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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Provide food, rations to stranded workers: SC

Context:

- A two judge bench of the Supreme Court is hearing a case on **the plight of the migrant labourer families during the second wave of the pandemic.**

Background:

- The lockdowns in several states have left many migrant workers **unemployed.**
- The loss of jobs and incomes has **pushed a large proportion of the population into poverty and nutritional insecurity.**

Details:

- Noting the difficulties being faced by the migrant labour population, the bench has emphasized the need for immediate government support for the stranded migrant labourer families.
- It has directed the concerned authorities to undertake the **distribution of dry rations and cooked food** and also explore the proposals to provide life support for migrant workers.

Important observations of the bench:

Lack of national database on migrant workers:

- The Court lamented the **inordinate delay in completing a national database to identify and register migrant workers.**
- Such a database would make it easier for the government to identify and provide essential support and benefits to the migrant workers under its different schemes. The lack of proper registration and identity cards would render the implementation of welfare schemes difficult on the ground level.
- The bench impressed upon the Central government and the State Governments to complete the process of registration of organised workers as early as possible.

- The court noted that the immediate handing out of dry rations and cooked food during the second wave should not depend on the completion of registration of workers and the database.

Need to ensure inclusion of even those without ration cards:

- Noting that the **central government's Atmanirbhar scheme** ensured providing of dry rations only to migrant workers covered under the Food Security Act, that is, people with ration cards, the court observed that the unorganised labourers, wandering from one place of work to another in mega cities, could not be expected to have ration cards.
- In this direction, the SC has asked the States to file affidavits indicating the mechanism by which the states plan to **distribute dry ration to migrant workers who do not possess a ration card**.
- The Bench directed that **"wide publicity" should be given to welfare schemes** for migrant workers, including locations of community kitchens, so that needy persons would benefit.

Cash transfers:

- Despite the potential advantage of a direct cash transfer to the migrant labourers, the court refused to entertain the plea to direct States to provide direct cash transfers to migrant workers, saying this was a **matter of policy concerning individual States or UTs**.
 - Direct cash transfers would allow the destitute workers to purchase essentials.
 - Given that such money would generate demand in the economy, it is bound to help in economic revival as well.

2. Won't limit functions till new data law: WhatsApp

Context:

- Facebook-owned WhatsApp has told the government that it will not limit functionality for users and will only continue reminding the users about the **privacy policy update** until the **Personal Data Protection law** comes into effect.

Background:

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

Background:

Whatsapp has come up with a new privacy policy in January 2021. In this new policy, WhatsApp made two significant changes which are:

- Almost all the data of the users will now be shared with Facebook and all other associates of the company. It not only means that WhatsApp is sharing the data with the parent company but also with the associates.
 - As a user, one does not have any idea who is going to have access to his/her data.
 - Whatsapp is only making sure that the chats and calls are safe and end to end encrypted.
 - Other than that, each and every piece of information will be shared which includes the locational data, IP address of the user, business name of the user, personal information of the user, etc.
 - This is totally against the privacy guaranteed by the Constitution under Article 21.
- The second change is the discriminatory nature of this privacy policy. This type of data collection or data sharing policy is not allowed in European countries because they have Global Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) under which privacy of residents of the European Union is protected.

Indian Government's reaction to this new privacy policy:

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology sent a notice to WhatsApp asking the company to withdraw its latest privacy policy update. The Ministry said that "We have a sovereign responsibility to protect the rights and interests of Indian citizens. The government will consider various options available under the law."
- The IT Ministry said that changes to the privacy policy undermine the values of informational privacy, data security, and user choice for Indian users and harms the rights and interests of Indian citizens.
- This is the second communication by the IT Ministry to WhatsApp asking to withdraw its controversial privacy policy. In January, the Ministry had written to Whatsapp, asking that the latest privacy and policy update be withdrawn.
- In the new notice sent, the IT Ministry reiterated the "discriminatory" treatment meted out to Indian WhatsApp users compared to those in Europe.
- "Many Indian citizens depend on WhatsApp to communicate in everyday life. It is not just problematic, but also irresponsible, for WhatsApp to leverage this position to impose unfair terms and conditions on Indian users,

particularly those that discriminate against Indian users vis-à-vis users in Europe,” the new notice reads.

- The Competition Commission of India is also looking into the privacy policy unveiled by WhatsApp.

Whatsapp’s argument on the notice:

- Despite the threat of legal action and some strong observations by the Ministry, WhatsApp seems undeterred.
- Apart from this, the company has also said that a majority of its users have already accepted the new privacy policy, but the company refused to specify the exact number.
- According to Whatsapp, for regular WhatsApp users, the new update doesn’t mean anything. There is end-to-end encryption for chats and calls so that the personal conversation will remain private.

Status of Privacy Law in India:

- In Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd) Vs Union of India case, the Supreme Court of India said that the Right to Privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21. Read more on the Puttaswamy Case.
- The B.N.Srikrishna committee framed the draft of the Personal Data Protection Bill. The data protection bill is pending in parliament.

Why do these companies have the edge to introduce such policies in India?

- Lack of dedicated privacy law has given an opportunity to such tech giants to ignore privacy-related concerns. When the government of the country is not serious about enacting such laws, and the government is not sure about how much privacy should be maintained, the companies have an edge to present before various courts to defend themselves.
- Therefore, we can say that these companies are taking advantage of such loopholes present in the system to monetize and expand their businesses by using the data of the users.

Way Forward:

- Strict laws, whether it is based on the model of GDPR of European countries or not, should be enacted in India to protect the data of the Indian users.
- Users should also resist such policies which are discriminatory and harmful to their privacy. People can switch to other platforms such as Signal, which is a rival of Whatsapp.

Conclusion:

- The people of India and the government should stand united against such tech giants who want to use the personal data of the people to monetize their businesses. Parliament should enact data protection laws to hold such corporations accountable.

3. A September exit, Afghanistan at the crossroads

Background:

- The U.S. has begun its withdrawal of the armed forces from Afghanistan.

Details:

- The article argues that while the U.S.'s withdrawal will end its war in Afghanistan, **peace in Afghanistan will remain uncertain and will depend on what steps major stakeholders take.**

Stalemate in the Afghan Peace process:

- The **Afghanistan peace process has been in disarray.**
 - The U.S. peace plan involves the dissolution of the current government and setting up of a new governing system that would include the Taliban. Such a government would decide the future distribution of power and changes to the Afghan Constitution. This proposal has not been accepted by Afghanistan President Mr. Ghani who has refused to step down for an interim regime to take over.
 - The **division between the various factions in Afghanistan** has only deepened over time.
 - **The Taliban has indulged in deadly attacks** on targets in different provinces. It has indulged in arbitrary acts of violence just to demonstrate its capability. Given the rising level of violence in Afghanistan, the prospects of negotiating peace in Afghanistan seem bleak.
 - There seems to be a difference of opinion between the field commanders and the Taliban leadership on the negotiations.
 - The **United Nations conference on the Afghan peace process scheduled in Istanbul**, Turkey remains suspended due to the reluctance of the Taliban.
 - The **U.S. administration is insistent on withdrawing its troops** even without any power-sharing deal between the warring parties in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's stakes:

- Being the Taliban's chief patron, Pakistan is the most important player in the Afghan conflict.
- The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan had kept Washington reliant on Rawalpindi for operational and other support. **Pakistan was able to leverage this for its strategic goals vis-a-vis India.** With the U.S. withdrawal, Pakistan faces an uphill task in conducting a viable Afghan policy. Pakistan -U.S. bilateral relations will depend upon Pakistan's role in ensuring a smooth transition of power in Kabul.
- **Kabul government's relation with Pakistan continues to be characterised by deep hostility and mistrust.** Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani has accused Pakistan of running "an organized system of support" for the Afghan Taliban.
- A potential civil war-like scenario in Afghanistan will not augur well for Pakistan given that it will lead to **unconstrained refugee flows** and terror attacks inside its territory.

China's stakes:

- Though China wants the Taliban to moderate its position, it continues to support the Taliban for strategic reasons.
- Despite public rhetoric of asking the U.S. to leave, the U.S.'s military presence in Afghanistan had helped suppress many **terrorist groups which threaten China directly or Beijing-friendly regimes in Central Asia.**
- The U.S. withdrawal has serious implications for China as it would leave China vulnerable to its **spillover effects, particularly in the restive Xinjiang province.**

India's stake:

- India has been the key regional backer of the Ghani government, supporting an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" peace process.
- India **fears a Taliban-dominated regime in Kabul** might allow Pakistan to dictate Afghanistan's India policy which could turn out to be detrimental to India's strategic interests.
- Despite considerable stakes, **India continues to be a peripheral player in the ongoing negotiations,** partly attributable to India's reluctance to engage in talks with the Taliban.
- Given the lack of leverage with the Taliban and the recent events projecting a most likely scenario of the Taliban taking over power, the article argues for India to explore the possibility of developing links with the amenable section of the Afghan Taliban.

- The reduction in tensions between India and Pakistan will have an indirect stabilising effect on Afghanistan.

4. Expanding the scope of POCSO

Context:

- The article argues for expanding the scope of the POCSO Act to enable prosecution of historical child sexual abuse.

Details:

- While the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO)** has been a step in the right direction to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, the POCSO Act has several deficiencies which need to be addressed to make it truly effective.
- A fundamental defect of POCSO is its **inability to deal with historical cases of child abuse**.
 - Historical child sexual abuse refers to incidents that are reported late.

Significance of including historical cases:

- The step to include prosecution of historical cases of child sexual abuse would be in line with the **growing international jurisprudence** around this issue.
- It would also help uphold the provisions of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

Concerns:

Contrary to established legal principles:

- The proposal seems to run counter to the **established principle of criminal law that requires an act of crime to be reported at the earliest**.
- Any delay in filing the complaint dilutes the efficacy of the prosecution's case.

Counter arguments:

- The circumstances around child sexual abuse cannot and must not be viewed in the same manner as other criminal offences.

Lack of understanding at the age:

- In the case of child sexual abuse, it is difficult for the child to report the offence or offender at the earliest point in time.
- It requires time and support for the child to recognise and comprehend the gravity of what transpired to report the offence.

Impeding factors:

- **Intra-familial abuse accounts for a large proportion of child abuse cases.**
- The delays in reporting sexual abuse may be due to factors such as **threats from the perpetrator, fear of public humiliation, and absence of trustworthy confidant for the child.**
- Sometimes a child keeps the abuse a secret because of the fear that no one will believe the abuse, which leads to accommodative behaviour on the part of the child.

Challenges in implementation:

Legal provisions:

- **Provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) prohibit judicial magistrates from taking cognisance of cases beyond a specific time period. Reporting of an offence, under Section 354 of the IPC, more than three years after the date of the incident would be barred by the CrPC. Given such provisions, the historical reporting of child sexual offences would be legally implausible.**

Availability of evidence:

- One of the major drawbacks of delayed reporting would be the lack of evidence to advance prosecution. There are **very few chances for gathering direct physical and medical evidence in such cases.**

Recommendations:

Changes in POCSO law:

- With growing research and empirical evidence pointing to behaviour justifying delayed reporting, there is a need to amend the law to allow delayed reporting and prosecution with regard to incidents of child sexual offences.
- India must **revise its legal and procedural methods to deal with historical child sexual abuse.**

For cases before 2012:

- The Union Ministry of Law and Justice's clarification that no time limit shall apply for POCSO cases is a welcome step and would help strengthen the POCSO jurisprudence, however, it does not help in cases that deal with incidents before 2012.
- Hence the Union government must **also frame guidelines to direct effective and purposeful prosecution in cases that are not covered by the POCSO.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. FDI flows crossed \$81 bn in FY21

Context:

- **Data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry** relating to foreign investment into India.

Details:

Impressive growth in foreign investment:

- **Foreign direct investment (FDI)** flows into India grew 10% in 2020-21 to touch a record \$81.72 billion. The FDI equity inflows have risen 19% to total almost \$60 billion.

Top investors:

- **Singapore** has emerged as the top investor followed by the U.S. and Mauritius.
- FDI equity flows from the U.S., the U.K. and Saudi Arabia have witnessed sharp increases.

Top destination states:

- **Gujarat** was the top FDI destination followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- The other regions have accounted for a disproportionately lower amount of 23% of the remaining foreign equity capital. This is indicative of the **skewed pattern of FDI inflows and concerns of unbalanced growth.**

Top sectors:

- **Computer software and hardware** has emerged as the top sector during 2020-21 with about 44% share of the total FDI equity inflow followed by construction (infrastructure) activities and services sector.
- Construction (infrastructure) activities, computer software and hardware, rubber goods, retail trading, drugs and pharmaceuticals and electrical equipment have recorded more than a 100% jump in equity during 2020-21.

6. 'GST Council should prioritise COVID relief, States' cash woes'

Context:

- Ahead of the **scheduled Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting**, the article discusses some of the major topics that would find detailed discussions during the meeting.

Details:

Tax relief:

- The council should consider **reducing the tax rates or zero-rating the GST on essential materials** to combat COVID like vaccines, medicines, hand sanitizers, oximeters and oxygen concentrators.
- The council should also consider providing **input tax credits to companies that have been importing critical medical items.**

Rationalizing GST rates:

- The council should **rationalise GST rates to provide relief to sectors like entertainment, hotels and tourism** that are worst hit by the second wave.
- The council should consider **reducing the GST rate for composition dealers.**
- COVID-related expenditures incurred by employers for the welfare of employees and their families like vaccination drives and distribution of oxygen concentrators may also be considered as an input tax credit.

Ensuring faster refunds:

- The industries must be enabled to **get their due refunds quicker to free up their working capital needs.** This will infuse the necessary liquidity into their finances.

- GST refunds for several exporters including gems and jewellery and IT sectors are stuck. The gems and jewellery industry has over ₹1,000 crore stuck in past accumulated input tax credits and due to backlog in refunds.

GST compensation to states:

- Given that the last GST meeting had ended without a consensus on the **Centre's GST compensation formula**, a new mechanism for paying States their compensation dues must be designed.
- States are still owed Rs. 63,000 crore from last year's dues and GST cess collections are unlikely to meet this year's compensation dues as well, following the spate of lockdowns across several States.

7. Odisha, Bengal grapple with evacuation ahead of cyclone

Context:

- Evacuation from the coastal districts of Odisha and West Bengal ahead of the **landfall of cyclone Yaas**.

Details:

- Cyclone Yaas is likely to make **landfall on the north Odisha-West Bengal coast between the Paradip Coast in Odisha and Sagar Island in West Bengal**, close to Balasore in Odisha.
- Along with heavy rain, the Indian Meteorological Department has issued a **storm surge warning**.
- Given the likelihood of it being a very severe cyclonic storm with wind speeds at the time of landfall likely to be about 155 to 165 kmph, **large scale evacuation from coastal and low lying areas is being undertaken**.
- West Bengal alone is in the process of evacuating about 10 lakh people to cyclone shelters.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Why community efforts are essential for real change

Important role played by civil society in second wave of Covid

- We also have to realise that the state or the market cannot be the **only provider for what citizens need**.
- **Effective social interactions** and community participation can play an important role in scaling up some of the actions that have been found useful.
- During the second wave of Covid infections, communities emerged as resilient entities across the country.
- **Active engagement with civil society:** Recently, the Prime Minister called for an active engagement of civil society in coping with the pandemic.
- The empowered group of secretaries has also identified the role of civil society during this period of crisis.

Tasks for NITI Aayog: New framework

- NITI should engage government institutions that encourage **public participation** and also support **new frameworks for crisis management**.
- This new framework should critically look into the weaknesses and failures of the existing ones in attracting **community participation in an effective manner**.
- This would also help in NITI's own goal of localisation of development as part of its SDG strategy.
- NITI should create mechanisms for facilitating the creation of required space for **community initiatives**.
- It should leverage advanced technologies ABCD – **artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing and data analytics** for bridging demand-supply gaps.
- It is time for NITI to apply the **institutional framework** where it has to, to rationalise select activities of communities and overcome the failure of the state where it is imminent.
- NITI should partner with willing state governments to explore the launch of platforms that promote **cross-learning and experience-sharing** to reduce the cost of operations.
- This may help in scaling up and, in some cases, overcome the **asymmetric flow of information**.
- Opportunities for the **participation of communities in decision making** and their implementation at local levels may be explored.
- The advantage for NITI is **DARPAN**, its portal for all voluntary organisations/ non-governmental organisations **engaged in development activities**.
- Several informal entities, start-ups and others, at times undefined, may also have to be engaged.

Initiatives and micro-models

- Several micro-models are coming up, but few have a larger footprint.
- In Nandurbar, for instance, a district collector could achieve what now seems a rare coordination between beds, number of critical patients and supply of oxygen.
- At the end of the day, they had more beds with oxygen than required.
- Breathe India and HelpNow represent an array of options, these apps have facilitated **access to oxygen concentrators, hospitals and ambulances.**
- There are several such initiatives that are taking place across the country with little connection with each other.
- These **micro-models need to be scaled up.**

Conclusion

Solutions to any social problem call for an effective collective action that coordinates the aspirations of several groups of stakeholders. The present situation underlines the necessity of combined efforts to face this challenge.

2. Appointment of CBI Chief

The high-powered selection committee headed by the Prime Minister has finalized some names for the post of CBI director.

Central Bureau of Investigation

- The CBI is the premier investigating agency of India operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
- It was originally set up to investigate bribery and governmental corruption.
- In 1965 it received expanded jurisdiction to investigate breaches of central laws enforceable by the Government of India, multi-state organized crime, multi-agency or international cases.
- The agency has been known to investigate several economic crimes, special crimes, cases of corruption, and other cases.
- CBI is exempted from the provisions of the Right to Information Act. CBI is India's officially designated single point of contact for liaison with Interpol.

Its composition

- The CBI is headed by a Director, an IPS officer with a rank of Director General of Police.

- The director is selected by a high-profile committee constituted under The Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946 as amended through The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, and has a two-year term.
- The Appointment Committee consists of:
 1. Prime Minister – Chairperson
 2. Leader of Opposition of Loksabha or the Leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha, if the former is not present due to lack of mandated strength in the Lok Sabha – member
 3. Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court Judge recommended by the Chief Justice – member

Jurisdiction, powers and restrictions

- The legal powers of investigation of the CBI are derived from the DSPE Act 1946, which confers powers, duties, privileges and liabilities on the Delhi Special Police Establishment (CBI) and officers of the UTs.
- The central government may extend to any area (except UTs) the powers and jurisdiction of the CBI for investigation, subject to the consent of the government of the concerned state.
- Members of the CBI at or above the rank of sub-inspector may be considered officers in charge of police stations.
- Under the DSPE Act, the CBI can investigate only with notification by the central government.

Relationship with state police

- The CBI was originally constituted under the DSPE Act, to operate within the territory of Delhi.
- As policing and law is a subject that falls within state powers under the structure of Indian federalism, the CBI needs prior consent from other state governments in order to conduct investigations within their territory.
- This consent can be in the form of a 'general consent' under Section 6 of the DSPE Act, which remains in operation for all investigations.
- Once consent is granted, the CBI can investigate economic, corruption, and special crimes (including national security, drugs and narcotics, etc.)
- Most Indian states had granted general consent to the CBI to investigate crimes within their territory.
- However, as of 2020, several states have withdrawn their 'general consent' for the CBI to operate, and require special consent to be granted on a case-to-case basis.

Issues with CBI

- In 2013, Judge of the Supreme Court of India (and later CJI) R. M. Lodha criticized the CBI for being a “caged parrot speaking in its master’s voice”.
- This was due to its excessive political interference irrespective of which party happened to be in power.

3. Competition Commission of India

Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs recently commemorated the 12th Annual Day of the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

Competition Commission of India

- CCI is the competition regulator in India.
- It is a statutory body responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 and promoting competition throughout India and preventing activities that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India.
- It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009.

Its establishment

- The idea of CCI was conceived and introduced in the form of The Competition Act, 2002 by the Vajpayee government.
- A need was felt to promote competition and private enterprise especially in the light of 1991 Indian economic liberalization.
- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, follows the philosophy of modern competition laws.
- The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises, and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control, and Merger and acquisition), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

4. Semiconductor chips shortage, and how carmakers are coping

A shortage of inputs, especially semiconductor chips, has made India-based car manufactures and premium bike makers curtail production across categories.

Chip famine

- The trigger point was the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns across the world that forced shut crucial chip-making facilities in countries including Japan, South Korea, China and the US.
- A key feature in a chip shortage is that it almost always causes cascading effects, given that the first one creates pent-up demand that becomes the cause for the follow-up famine.

Why such famine?

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in supply chains and logistics.
- This is coupled with a 13% increase in global demand for PCs owing to some countries' shift to a stay-at-home economy.
- This has impacted the availability of key chips necessary for the manufacturing of a broad range of electronics being a necessary component of every industry.

What is the impact of the chip famine?

- Consumers of semiconductor chips, which are mainly car manufacturers and consumer electronics manufactures, have not been receiving enough of this crucial input to continue production.
- There were two reasons for this: a steady decline in input prices and improvements in the processing power of chips.
- The number of transistors mounted in IC circuit chips has doubled every two years.
- Notably, the increase in chip consumption over the last decade is also partly attributable to the rising contribution of electronic components in a car's bill of materials.

How have vehicle makers responded?

- Supply constraints are learned to have caused some output issues at notable Indian auto firms.
- In addition to delaying vehicle deliveries, some companies have reportedly started discarding features and high-end electronic capabilities on a temporary basis.

5. Towards a more equitable post-pandemic growth

Need to address growth and inequality issue

- The second wave of the pandemic is spreading to rural areas also.
- It is known that rural areas have poor health infrastructure.
- Similar to the first wave, **inequalities are also increasing** during the second wave.
- The country has to address the issue of **rising inequalities** for achieving **higher sustainable growth** and the well-being of a larger population.
- According to the State of Working in India 2021 report of the Azim Premji University, the pandemic would push **230 million people into poverty**.
- CMIE data shows a **decline in incomes and rising unemployment** during the second wave.
- **U-shaped impact:** The recent RBI Bulletin says that the impact of the second wave **appears to be U-shaped**.
- In the well of the U are the most vulnerable — blue collar groups who have to risk exposure for a living and for rest of society to survive.

K-shaped recovery and rising inequality

- The recovery seemed to be K-shaped during the first wave.
- The **share of wages declined as compared to that of profits**.
- A large part of the corporate sector managed the pandemic with many **listed companies recording higher profits**.
- On the other hand, the informal workers including daily wage labourers, migrants, MSMEs etc. **suffered a lot with loss of incomes and employment**.
- The recovery post the second wave is also likely to be **K-shaped with rising inequalities**.

Policies needed for higher growth and reduction in inequality

1) Vaccination and healthcare facilities

- An aggressive vaccination programme and improving the healthcare facilities in **both rural and urban areas** is needed.
- Reducing the health crisis can **lead to an economic revival**.
- Vaccine inequality between urban and rural areas has to be reduced.
- The crisis can be used as an opportunity **to create universal healthcare facilities for all**, particularly rural areas.
- Other states can learn from Kerala on building health infrastructure.

2) Investment in infrastructure

- The budget offered some good announcements relating to capital investment in infrastructure.
- The **Development Financial Institution (DFI)** for funding long-term infrastructure projects is being established.
- This can revive employment and reduce inequalities.
- The government has to **fast track infra investment**.

3) Safety net for vulnerable

- The informal workers and other vulnerable sections including MSMEs have been dealt back-to-back blows due to the first and second waves.
- A majority of workers have experienced a loss of earnings.
- Therefore, the government has to provide safety nets in the form of **free food grains for six more months, expand work offered under MGNREGA** in both rural and urban areas.
- The government also need to undertake a cash transfer to provide **minimum basic income**.

Policies for growth

- **Focus on demand:** On economic growth, the RBI Bulletin says that the biggest toll of the second wave is **in terms of a demand shock as aggregate supply is less impacted**.
- **Investment:** In the medium term, the investment rate has to be increased from the present 30 per cent of GDP to 35 per cent and 40 per cent of GDP for higher growth and job creation.
- **Export:** It is one of the main **engines of growth** and employment creation.
- There is **positive news on exports** as the global economy is reviving.
- **Protectionist trade policy:** In recent years India's trade policy has become more protectionist and the **country has to reduce import tariff rates**.
- **Role of fiscal policy:** In the near term, fiscal policy has to play a more important role in achieving the objectives of growth, jobs and equity by **expanding the fiscal space** by restructuring expenditure, widening the tax base and increasing non-tax revenue.

Conclusion

Vaccination, expansion in rural healthcare and cash transfers should be part of the strategy to boost demand and address inequalities.

6. 3D distribution of Molecular & Atomic Hydrogen in Galaxies

Indian scientists have estimated the three-dimensional distribution of molecular and atomic hydrogen in a nearby galaxy which can help lead to clues to the star formation processes and the evolution of the galaxy.

Study on Hydrogen distribution

- Galaxies like the one we reside in, the Milky Way, consist of discs containing stars, molecular and atomic hydrogen, and helium.
- The molecular hydrogen gas collapses on itself in distinct pockets, forming stars, its temperature was found to be low –close to 10 kelvin, or $-263\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, and thickness is about 60 to 240 light-years.
- The atomic hydrogen extends both above and below the discs.
- Indian scientists have estimated that molecular hydrogen extends farther from the disc in both directions, up to about 3000 light-years.
- This gaseous component is warmer than the one straddling the disc and has comparatively lesser densities, thus escaping earlier observations.
- They called it the ‘diffuse’ component of the molecular disc.

Why does this study matter?

- The molecular hydrogen gas converts to individual stars under the pull of gravity, thus holding clues to the star formation processes and the evolution of the galaxy.
- If a significant part of the gas extends beyond the thin disc of a few hundred light-years, it may explain why astronomers also observe stars at a few thousand light-years perpendicular to the galactic disc.

Prelims Practice Questions

1) Mount Nyiragongo, sometimes seen in the news recently, is located in?

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

Answer : c

- **Mount Nyiragongo in Congo** has recently spewed out a river of lava.
- The volcano was last erupted in 2002.

Mount Nyiragongo

- It is one of the world's more active volcanoes but there were concerns that its activity had not been properly observed by the Goma Volcano Observatory, since the World Bank cut funding amid allegations of corruption.
- The lava in Mount Nyiragongo is particularly fluid and has the potential to move fast.
- The volcano's deadliest eruption happened in 1977, when more than 600 people died.

2) Sulphur 2020 Vision is prepared and published by which of the following organizations?

- a. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
- b. International Maritime Organization (IMO)
- c. Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers
- d. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Answer : b

Sulphur 2020 Vision

- Sulphur dioxide (SO₂), a colourless, bad-smelling, toxic gas, is part of a larger group of chemicals referred to as sulphur oxides (SO_x).
- These gases, especially SO₂, are emitted by the burning of fossil fuels coal, oil, and diesel or other materials that contain sulphur.
- International Maritime Organization's (IMO's) Sulphur 2020 vision estimates that the capping standards for sulphur content in ships fuel will lead to a 77% drop in overall sulphur oxide emissions from ships.
- It will lead to an annual reduction of 8.5 million tonnes of SO_x.

- On January 1, 2020, the IMO, a UN body, started the enforcement of a rule banning sulphur-heavy fuel.
- Since sulphur-light fuel can be very expensive, it allowed ships to install exhaust scrubbers that use high-volume, high-speed, water spray to absorb pollutants from the exhaust.
- There are two types of scrubber open-loop ones that dumps the scrubber wastewater into the sea/at the port and closed loop ones that treat the wastewater before dumping.
- The time of adopting the new norms, it was hoped that more ships will get fitted with closed-loop scrubber systems.
- While the ban on sulphur-rich fuel has driven up fitting of scrubbers 250 ships in 2015 versus 4,300 ships in 2021 data from early last year showed the scrubbers were overwhelmingly open-loop.
- Both kinds of scrubbers have led to the dumping of 10 gigatons of scrubber wastewater containing dangerous pollutants and toxic chemicals, including carcinogenic hydrocarbons.

3) Which of the following organizations publishes Protected Planet Report?

- a. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- b. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
- c. The Nature Conservancy
- d. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Answer : a

Protected Planet Report

- It is a biennial publication by UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).
- It assess the state of protected and conserved areas around the world.
- 2020 edition provides the final report on the status of Aichi Biodiversity Target.
- Aichi Biodiversity Targets (ABTs) is part of Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, adopted during the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) in 2010 in Nagoya, Japan.
- Target 11: By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water, and 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved.
- Since 2010, protected areas covering almost 21 million km² have been added to the global network.

- Since 2010, 82% of countries and territories have increased their share of protected area and coverage of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM).
- OECM are areas that are achieving the effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas.
- It recommends to scale up conservation even in countries without large areas of intact biodiversity.

4) Consider the following statements:

1. Mount Nyiragongo is an active stratovolcano in the Philippines.
2. Barren Island is the only active volcano in India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Mount Nyiragongo is an active stratovolcano in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Barren Island is the only active volcano in India.

5) Which of the following statements about International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is/are correct?

1. It is an organization within the United Nations family.
2. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
3. IAEA was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is a UN agency. Although the IAEA is an independent international organisation, it reports annually to the UNGA.
- It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.
- IAEA was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, along with its former Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei.

6. Consider the following statements about Cess:

1. A cess is an additional tax imposed with a purpose of raising funds for a specific task.
2. Article 250 of the Indian Constitution prohibits the sharing of cess with the State Governments.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer : A

Explanation

- Different from the usual taxes and duties like excise and personal income tax, a **Cess is imposed as an additional tax** besides the existing tax (tax on tax) with a purpose of **raising funds for a specific task. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The Union government is empowered to raise revenue through a gamut of levies, including taxes (both direct and indirect), surcharges, fees and cess.
 - A cess, generally paid by everyday public, is added to their basic tax liability paid as part of total tax paid.
 - **Article 270** of the Constitution allows cess to be excluded from the purview of the divisible pool of taxes that the Union government must share with the States. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - Article 250 mentions the power of Parliament to legislate with respect to any matter in the State List in case of emergency.

- Cess should be kept as a separate fund after allocating to Consolidated Fund of India and can be spent only for a specific purpose.
- A cess is meant to raise revenue and is therefore temporary in nature.
 - A particular cess continues to be levied till the time the government collects enough funds for the purpose that it was introduced for.



Mains Practice Questions

1. Creation of a vibrant knowledge society can be ensured by higher quality education to all thereby making India a 'Global knowledge Super Power'. Explain. (250 words)

Approach

- Start your answer by showing a contrast between India's status of knowledge superpower in ancient times and status of education today.
- Briefly mention the key advantages, which could work in its favour in India becoming Global knowledge Super Power.
- Mention various challenges that are ailing India's education system.
- Conclude your answer by enumerating the steps to be taken to make India a knowledge superpower.

2. "Parliament is a deliberative assembly, and that the parliamentarian owes his constituents not his industry only, but his judgment" Explain this statement in the context of the Tenth Schedule to the Indian Constitution. (250 words)

Approach

- Describe the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution briefly highlighting its importance.
- Discuss the issues with anti defection law with respect to roles and responsibilities of the parliamentarians.
- Substantiate your arguments with examples.
- Conclude by assessing the premises of your answer.