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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. SC had cautioned govt. on privacy

Context:

Recently, **WhatsApp** has approached the Delhi High Court **challenging the Central government's new Information Technology Rules, 2021.**

Background:

- In September 2019, hearing a petition filed by Facebook, the top court showed **deep concern at the utilisation of social media for committing crimes.**
- It said the medium had become a **source for pornography, criminals** to run weapons, drugs and contraband. The court had even felt that some messages on social media may even **threaten national sovereignty.**
- It was in this context the court had called for a **properly framed regime to allow the government to get information about the first originators of messages from significant social media intermediaries with end-to-end encryption technology.**
 - However, the court had exercised restraint, too. It warned that **de-encryption, if easily available, could defeat the fundamental right to privacy.**
- The court had clarified that the **government should ensure that the privacy of the individual is not invaded.** The order had also underlined that **traceability should be restricted to specific circumstances.**
- **In the Puttuswamy Case, the SC had said** "The essential role of the test of proportionality is to enable the court to determine whether a legislative measure is disproportionate in its interference with the fundamental right... In determining this, the court will have regard to whether a less intrusive measure could have been adopted consistent with the object of the law and whether the impact of the encroachment on a fundamental right is disproportionate to the benefit which is likely to ensue.

Issue:

- The new rules compel the **social media platforms to compulsorily enable "the identification of the first originator of the information"** in India upon **government or court order.**

- But WhatsApp finds traceability under the new rules “disproportionate”. The privacy of each one of its users would be compromised as there was no way to predict which message would be subject to a tracing order from the government.
- In its petition before the Delhi High Court, it said that it would have to **build an ability to identify the first originator of every message, to be served up to the government forever**. This means even legal users and their messages would be under watch. It would have a **chilling effect on free speech**.

2. U.S.-China engagement era has come to an end: top U.S. official

Context:

Changing U.S. - China relationship.

Details:

- A top official (**Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs**) of the **Biden administration** has said “More than three-decade long era of engagement between the United States and China that saw the world’s two largest economies develop closely interdependent relations has come to an end”.
- He said **competition would henceforth be the dominant paradigm** and **U.S. policy would work under a new set of strategic parameters**.
- The comments **underline the shift in U.S. views on China from the time of the Obama administration** as well as the broadly bipartisan consensus on the current direction of relations, following four turbulent years for the relationship under the previous Trump administration.
- He said that the U.S. believed that the **best way to engage a more assertive China is to work with allies, partners and friends**.
- He said that the **Chinese policies** under President Xi **are in large part responsible for the shift in U.S. policy**, citing **clashes on China’s border with India, an economic campaign against Australia** and the rise of China’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy.

Wolf warrior diplomacy

- It is a new approach inside China and **reinforces a presumed transition of Chinese diplomacy from conservative, passive, and low-key to assertive, proactive, and high-profile**.
- Wolf Warrior and Wolf Warrior II are Chinese action blockbusters that highlight agents of Chinese special operation forces. They have boosted national pride and patriotism among Chinese viewers.

- “Wolf-warrior diplomacy,” named after these movies, describes offensives by Chinese diplomats to defend China’s national interests, often in confrontational ways.
- Many Chinese believe the Western media portrayal of China is highly biased, often with ideological and racist tinges. Wolf-warrior diplomacy is part of the Chinese government’s endeavour to “tell the China story.”

3. Nine-pin bowling aimed at free speech, privacy

The editorial talks about concerns relating to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Background:

- In February 2021, the government notified guidelines: The Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Positive aspects of the guidelines:

The Rules mandate duties such as:

- **Removal of non-consensual intimate pictures** within 24 hours.
- Publication of **compliance reports** to increase transparency.
- Setting up of a **dispute resolution mechanism** for content removal.
- Adding a **label to information for users** to know whether the content is advertised, owned, sponsored or exclusively controlled.

Concerns:

While there are positive aspects about the guidelines, there are some glaring ambiguities that are **not in line with the prior precedents** such as the Supreme Court (SC) judgement in **K.S. Puttaswamy case**.

Ambiguities and Privacy Issues:

- If the social media platforms do not comply with the rules, they would be deprived of their safe harbour immunity.
 - Generally, these intermediaries/social media platforms **do not have editorial control over the content**.
 - Therefore, countries are encouraged to enact safe harbour protections which offer immunity to intermediaries from criminal liability.

- In India, the safe harbour provisions have been defined under Section 79 of the IT Act.
- According to the new rules, **in case due diligence is not followed by the intermediary, the safe harbour provisions would not apply to them.**
- An intermediary is supposed to **take down content within 36 hours** upon receiving orders from the Government.
 - Owing to a strict timeline, the intermediary is **deprived of fair recourse** in the event that it disagrees with the Government's order.
- In addition, the Government is placed as the ultimate adjudicator of objectionable speech online. This might adversely **impact free speech.**
- It is argued that democracy stands undermined in direct proportion to every attack made on the citizen's right to have a private conversation, to engage in a transaction, to dissent, to have an opinion and to articulate the same without any fear of being imprisoned.
- The rules **undermine the right to privacy** by imposing a traceability requirement.

Gagging a right:

- In Life Insurance Corpn. Of India vs Prof. Manubhai D. Shah (1992) case, the SC had elevated '**the freedom to circulate one's views as the lifeline of any democratic institution**'.
 - It said '**any attempt to stifle, suffocate or gag this right would sound a death knell to democracy**' and would '**help usher in autocracy or dictatorship**'.

Information Technology ultra vires to the IT Act:

- The **rules were framed** by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY).
- The Second Schedule of the Business Rules, 1961 does not empower MeiTY to frame regulations for 'digital media.'
 - **This power belongs to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**
- In this case, although MeiTY has said that these rules shall be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, **this action violates the legal principle of 'colourable legislation'** where the legislature cannot do something indirectly if it is not possible to do so directly.
- The **Information Technology Act, 2000, does not regulate digital media.** Therefore, the **new IT Rules** which claim to be a piece of **subordinate legislation of the IT Act**, are **beyond the rule-making power** conferred upon them by the IT Act.

- This makes the Rules ultra vires to the Act.

Financial Burden:

- Rules create additional operational costs for intermediaries by requiring them to have Indian resident nodal officers, compliance officers and grievance officers.
- Intermediaries are also required to have offices located in India.
 - This makes profit-making a far-fetched goal for multinational corporations and start-up intermediary enterprises.

Way Forward:

- **Defining what constitutes fake news** within the **ambit of the rules** must be the first step to eliminating the fake news **rather than hurriedly taking down** whatever an arbitrary, biased **authority may deem as fake news**.
- **Regulations in the absence of data protection** would make the data from conversations **vulnerable to attack from ill-intentioned third parties**. It would pose threats of invasion and deprivation from a safe space.
- There is an urgent need to **critically scrutinise the recent barriers** being imposed via these Rules **against the right to free speech and expression**.

4. Yet to receive draft regulation: govt.

Context:

Policies introduced by Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Khoda Patel in Lakshadweep have sparked protests in the union territory.

- Patel was made administrator of Lakshadweep in December 2020.
- He took over as the Administrator after the passing of Dineshwar Sharma, former Director, Intelligence Bureau.

Issues:

- The **Draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021 (LDAR)** gives the administrator **powers to remove or relocate islanders from their property, for town planning or any developmental activity**.
- The draft regulation proposes **seven years' imprisonment for the consumption or the sale of beef**.

- Under the **Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA)**, introduced in January 2021, a person can be detained without any public disclosure for a period of up to one year.
- As per a draft panchayat notification, a member with more than two children is disqualified from being a member.

Details:

- The draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation (LDAR), 2021 will require ratification from the Union Home Ministry and the Cabinet before it is implemented.
- The Union Home Ministry is the **administrating authority for the Union Territory of Lakshadweep**.
- Any **proposed change** to the laws in Lakshadweep is **to be brought through regulations, instead of a Bill** as is the case in other UTs with a legislature such as Delhi and Puducherry.
- These **regulations are then put up for public consultation** and once the response is received, it is sent to the Union Home Ministry.
- The **Ministry will examine the regulations**, and only after it clears them will the **draft be sent to the Union Cabinet for approval**.

5. Incorporating limits

The article talks about the **proposed hate speech provisions under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.

Free Speech:

- Besides not containing abuse, defamation or incitement to violence, responsible speech is increasingly seen as an expression that tends **not to discriminate against or incite hatred towards groups based on race, gender, caste, religious belief, sexual orientation, nationality or immigration status**.
- The world sees a free speech doctrine as the one that **discourages the targeting of any vulnerable section**.
- In modern democracies, the **right to free speech is restricted**. While speech is free, the freedom comes with responsibility.
- The term 'hate speech' and calls for framing laws that seek to punish 'hate speech' arise from the **basis on which speech is restricted in modern democracies**.

Including 'hate speech' in the Indian Penal Code:

- In 2020, the Home Minister called for a **revamp of the criminal justice system** and sought views of the states on changes that may be required in four key criminal justice laws – the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), Arms Act and the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS).
- Consequently, there were **proposals to incorporate provisions against hate speech in the penal law**. This move has been largely welcomed.
- A committee has been appointed by the Home Ministry for recommending changes in criminal law.
 - This committee is seeking to formulate new provisions that will make **hate speech a separate offence**.
- While the term ‘hate speech’ may not be used, the panel is examining **recommendations made by the Law Commission and the Expert Committee headed by T.K. Viswanathan (which dealt with cybercrimes especially online hate speech)**, on adding Sections 153C and 505A to the IPC.
 - The proposed **Section 153C** would target speech that **gravely threatens any person or group** with the intention to cause fear or alarm, or incite violence towards them, and prescribe a sentence of two years in prison and a fine.
 - Section 505A proposes to punish speech or writing that causes fear or alarm among a group, or provokes violence against it, **on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, place of birth or disability**.
- But, the Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws has attracted criticisms questioning its ability to gather a wide range of opinion during the pandemic and for not being inclusive.

Way Forward:

- A **comprehensive revamping of the criminal justice system** can provide measures to check hate speech.
- In the context of the hate speech provisions, the committees’ efforts must be directed towards **narrowly defining the sections it proposes to formulate and avoid using vague and overbroad terms**.
 - Example: Section 66A of the Information Technology Act was struck down by the Supreme Court because it **failed to define some terms that sought to criminalise** offensive and annoying messages.
- New sections (if any) should be clear about **what is sought to be punished as incitement to violence or advocacy of hatred, posing an imminent threat to public order or a targeted group**. Only then will it be a valid curb on free speech.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Uncertainty, risks cloud outlook: RBI

What's in News?

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its annual report for 2020-21 has said that the global, as well as the domestic outlook, has turned grim – overcast with extreme uncertainty and downside risks in the backdrop of the pandemic, mutant strains of the virus, the slow pace of vaccination.

- It asserted that a durable **revival in private consumption and investment demand** together would be critical for a self-sustaining GDP growth trajectory post-COVID-19 as **they account for around 85% of GDP**.
- It asked the banks to **closely monitor bad loans** and **prepare for higher provisioning**.
 - The gross non-performing assets ratio of scheduled commercial banks has declined owing to **prudent provisioning – resulting in an improvement in the provision coverage ratio**.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Currency swap between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

Bangladesh's central bank has approved a \$200 million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka.

What is a Currency Swap?

- In this context, a currency swap is effectively a loan that Bangladesh will give to Sri Lanka in dollars, with an agreement that the debt will be repaid with interest in Sri Lankan rupees.

- For Sri Lanka, this is cheaper than borrowing from the market, and a lifeline as it struggles to maintain adequate forex reserves even as repayment of its external debts looms.
- The period of the currency swap will be specified in the agreement.

A helping hand for SL

- Bangladesh Bank, the central bank, has in principle approved a \$200 million currency swap agreement with Sri Lanka.
- Dhaka decided to extend the facility after a request by Sri Lankan PM Mahinda Rajapaksa to Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina.
- It will help Colombo tide over its foreign exchange crisis, according to media reports from Bangladesh, quoting the bank's spokesman.
- Sri Lanka, staring at an external debt repayment schedule of \$4.05 million this year, is in urgent need of foreign exchange.

An unusual move

- Bangladesh has not been viewed so far as a provider of financial assistance to other countries.
- It has been among the most impoverished countries of the world, and still receives billions of dollars in financial aid.
- But over the last two decades, its economy has pulled itself up literally by the bootstraps, and in 2020, was the fastest growing in South Asia.
- Bangladesh's economy grew by 5.2 percent in 2020 and is expected to grow by 6.8 percent in 2021.
- The country has managed to pull millions out of poverty. Its per capita income just overtook India's.

A break in monopoly

- This may be the first time that Bangladesh is extending a helping hand to another country, so this is a landmark of sorts.
- It is also the first time that Sri Lanka is borrowing from a SAARC country other than India.
- The presumption was that only India, as the regional group's largest economy, could do this.
- The Bangladesh-Sri Lanka arrangement shows that is no longer valid.

Why didn't SL approach India?

- Last year, it requested for a \$1 billion credit swap, and separately, a moratorium on debts that the country has to repay to India.

- But India-Sri Lanka relations have been tense over Colombo's decision to cancel a valued container terminal project at Colombo Port.
- India put off the decision, but Colombo no longer has the luxury of time.

Is SL in a crisis?

- With the tourism industry destroyed since the 2019 Easter attacks, Sri Lanka had lost one of its top foreign exchange pullers even before the pandemic.
- The tea and garment industries have also been hit by the pandemic affecting exports.
- Remittances increased in 2020, but are not sufficient to pull Sri Lanka out of its crisis.
- The country is already deep in debt to China. According to media reports, Sri Lanka owes China up to \$5 billion.

What about the previous swap facility that India gave Sri Lanka?

- Last July, the RBI did extend a \$400 million credit swap facility to Sri Lanka, which the Central Bank of Sri Lanka settled in February. The arrangement was not extended.
- RBI has a framework under which it can offer credit swap facilities to SAARC countries within an overall corpus of \$2 billion.
- According to RBI, the SAARC currency swap facility came into operation in November 2012 with the aim of providing to smaller countries in the region.

2. UAE's Golden Visa Scheme

A Bollywood actor has recently received a golden visa from the UAE government.

What is the Golden Visa?

- The Golden Visa system essentially offers long-term residency (5 and 10 years) to people belonging to the following groups: investors, entrepreneurs, individuals with outstanding talents the likes of researchers, medical professionals and those within the scientific and knowledge fields, and remarkable students.
- The main benefit of the visa will be security.
- The UAE government has made it clear that they are committed to providing expatriates, investors and essentially everyone looking to make the UAE their home an extra reason to feel secure about their future.

Who are eligible to apply?

- For the 10-year visa, investors having no less than AED (Dirham) 10 million worth of public investment, either in the form of an investment fund or a company, can apply.
- However, at least 60 per cent of the total investment must not be in the form of real estate and the invested amount must not be loaned, or in case of assets, investors must assume full ownership.
- The investor must be able to retain the investment for a minimum of three years as well.
- The long-term visa can also include the holder's spouse and children, as well as one executive director and one advisor.
- In addition to the aforementioned, foreign nationals who are looking to set up their business in the UAE may also apply for permanent residency (5 years) through the Golden Business Visa scheme.

Perks for the talent

- Besides entrepreneurs, individuals with specialized talent can also apply for the visa. They include doctors, researchers, scientists, investors and artists.
- These individuals may be granted a 10-year visa following accreditations granted by their respective departments and fields and the visa will also be extended to their spouses and children.
- Exceptional high school and university students are eligible for a 5-year residency visa in the UAE.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

3. Odisha's blackbucks double in 6 years

Odisha's blackbuck population has doubled in the last six years, according to figures from the latest population census.

Blackbucks in Odisha

- Blackbucks are found only in the Ganjam district in the southern part of the state, which is where the census was carried out.
- It is known in Odisha and Ganjam as Krushnasara Mruga.

- The people of Ganjam believe the sighting of a blackbuck in a paddy field is a harbinger of luck for them.
- It used to be sighted in the Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary in Puri district till 2012-13, but now has vanished from the area.
- The blackbuck is a Schedule-1 animal according to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (amended in 1992) and is considered as '**Vulnerable**' according to the Red Data Book.

Reasons for their rise

- Improvement of habitats, the protection given by the local people and forest staff were some of the reasons for the increase of the population.
- The people of Ganjam had been enthusiastically protecting the animal like the Bishnois of western Rajasthan and the Vala Rajputs of Saurashtra.

4. Bharat Ratna Professor CNR Rao

Bharat Ratna Professor C.N.R. Rao has received the International Eni Award 2020 for research into renewable energy sources and energy storage, also called the Energy Frontier award.

Who is CNR Rao?

- Rao is an Indian chemist who has worked mainly in solid-state and structural chemistry.
- Rao is one of the world's foremost solid state and materials chemists. He has contributed to the development of the field over five decades.

His scientific contributions

His work on transition metal oxides has led to a basic understanding of novel phenomena and the relationship between materials properties and the structural chemistry of these materials.

- Rao was one of the earliest to synthesize two-dimensional oxide materials such as La_2CuO_4 .
- He was one of the first to synthesize 123 cuprates, the first liquid nitrogen-temperature superconductor in 1987. He was also the first to synthesis Y junction carbon nanotubes in the mid-1990s.
- His work has led to a systematic study of compositionally controlled metal-insulator transitions.

- Such studies have had a profound impact in application fields such as colossal magnetoresistance and high-temperature superconductivity.
- He has made immense contributions to nanomaterials over the last two decades, besides his work on hybrid materials.

Citations for the Energy Frontiers award

- Professor Rao has been working on hydrogen energy as the only source of energy for the benefit of all mankind.
- Hydrogen storage, photochemical and electrochemical production of hydrogen, solar production of hydrogen, and non-metallic catalysis were the highlights of his work.
- The EF award has been conferred for his work on metal oxides, carbon nanotubes, and other materials and two-dimensional systems, including graphene, boron-nitrogen-carbon hybrid materials, and molybdenum sulfide (Molybdenite – MoS₂) for energy applications and green hydrogen production.
- Green hydrogen production can be achieved through various processes, including the photodissociation of water, thermal dissociation, and electrolysis activated by electricity produced from solar or wind energy.

Significance of this award

- This is considered to be the Nobel Prize in Energy Research.

5. RBI's Annual Report 2020-21

Why in News

Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** released its Annual Report for 2020-21.

Key Points

- **Foreign Exchange:**
 - Gain from foreign exchange transactions **rose from Rs 29,993 crore to Rs 50,629 crore in 2020-21.**
 - Foreign Exchange is the **trading of one currency for another.**
- **Surplus Transfer to the Government:**
 - RBI has been able to **transfer a higher amount to the government as surplus** this year following a **sharp fall in provisions** (drop in

expenditure was on account of a lower provision) **and gains from foreign exchange** transactions during the year ended March 2021.

- It transferred **Rs. 99,122 crore** to the government which is likely to **boost the government's finances**. It helped the government even as the **Covid pandemic** continued.

Provision for Giving Surplus to the Government

- **Under Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934**, after making provisions for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contribution to staff and superannuation funds and for all matters for which provisions are to be made by or under the Act or that are usually provided by bankers, the **balance of the profits of the Reserve Bank is required to be paid to the central government**.
- **Rupee Against Dollar:**
 - The rupee strengthened by **3.5%** against the US dollar (**at end-March 2021 over end-March 2020**) but **underperformed vis-a-vis other Asian countries** during 2020-21.
- **Decreased Bank Frauds:**
 - **Bank frauds of Rs.1 lakh and more fell by 25%** in value to Rs.1.38 trillion in the year 2020-21 with the number of such cases also seeing a **decline of 15% during the year**.
- **Digital Payments:**
 - The Covid-19 pandemic **increased** the proliferation of digital modes of payments.
 - Total **digital transaction volume in 2020-21 stood at 4,371 crore**, as against **3,412 crore in 2019-20**.
 - The prospects for **FinTech** in India's financial system in 2021-22 will depend upon the degree of entrenchment of digital usage.
 - Various **initiatives such as an innovation hub, a regulatory sandbox and offline payment solutions** are underway to ensure that in the digital ecosystem, India maintains its position as a leader.
 - The **RBI is also in the process of extending the geo-tagging framework put in place to capture location of bank branches and ATMs** to cover payment system touch points, enabling accurate capture of their location across the country.
 - Further, the **possibility of leveraging India's domestic payment systems to facilitate cross-border transactions** is being explored, and corridors and charges for inward remittances will be reviewed.
- **Ensuring Liquidity:**
 - The RBI will **ensure a comfortable level of liquidity in the system** during 2021- 22 in **alignment with the stance of monetary policy**.

- This is exemplified by the introduction of the secondary market **G-sec acquisition programme (G-SAP)**.
- **Monetary transmission will continue unimpeded while maintaining financial stability.**
 - Monetary transmission **refers to the process by which a central bank's monetary policy signals (like repo rate) are passed on**, through the financial system to influence the businesses and households.
- **Economic Growth:**
 - As the vaccination drive picks up and cases of infections fall, a sharp turnaround in growth is likely, supported by strong favourable **base effects**.
 - The **base effect refers to the effect that the choice of a basis of comparison or reference can have on the result** of the comparison between data points.
 - RBI predicted **10.5% GDP (Gross Domestic Product)** growth for the year 2021-22.

6. The Climate Breakthroughs Summit

Why in News

Recently, world leaders convened at the **Climate Breakthroughs Summit** to demonstrate progress in critical sectors of the global economy, including steel, shipping, **green hydrogen** and nature.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - This is a collaboration between the **World Economic Forum, Mission Possible Partnership, the United Nations Climate Champions, and the United Kingdom (COP 26 Presidency)**.
 - It aims to demonstrate the need for systemic change to accelerate the global transition to a **zero-carbon economy**.
 - The **"Zero carbon economy"** refers to the green ecological economy based on low energy consumption and low pollution, where emissions are compensated by absorption and removal of greenhouse gases (**net-zero**).
 - One of its key campaigns is the **'Race to Zero' campaign** that mobilises support of 708 cities, 24 regions, 2,360 businesses, 163 investors, and

624 higher education institutions to move towards zero-carbon recovery for a sustainable future.

▪ **Highlights of the Summit:**

- The **United Nations** made a call for coordinated action to secure global net-zero emissions and fulfill its goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels by 2050.
- **Maersk, the world's largest container shipping line and vessel operator, joined Race to Zero** with the commitment to halving the emission by 2030.
- **As many as 40 health care institutions worldwide have committed to halving emissions by 2030** and reaching net zero by 2050.
 - These 40 institutions represent more than 3,000 health care facilities in 18 countries.
- The transitions of individual companies and institutions such as these are **being supported by sector-wide plans**, reflected in the revised **Climate Action Pathways, launched with the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action.**
 - The pathways set out sectoral visions for achieving a 1.5°C resilient world in 2050, providing a roadmap to help countries and non-State actors alike to identify actions needed by 2021, 2025, 2030 and 2040 to deliver a zero-carbon world in time.

▪ **Significance:**

- **Decarbonizing both heavy industry** (aluminium, concrete and cement, chemicals, metals and mining, plastics and steel) **and light industry** (consumer goods, fashion, ICT and mobile, and retail) is **technically and economically feasible.**
- This **can be done through** reducing materials and energy use; increasing their productivity; and decarbonising production processes while implementing transitional solutions such as natural climate solutions where direct emissions reduction cannot be achieved.

Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action

- It supports implementation of the **Paris Agreement** by enabling collaboration between **governments and the cities, regions, businesses and investors** that must act on **climate change.**
- The focus is on **environmental, economic and social system transformation, promoting higher ambition** of all stakeholders to collectively strive for the **1.5 °C temperature** goal and a climate-neutral and **resilient world.**

Race to Zero Campaign

- Race to Zero is the **UN-backed global campaign** rallying **non-state actors** – including companies, cities, regions, financial and educational institutions – to take rigorous and immediate action to halve **global emissions by 2030** and deliver a healthier, fairer, **zero-carbon world in time**.
- Race To Zero mobilizes actors outside of national governments to join the **Climate Ambition Alliance**.

Climate Ambition Alliance

- The CAA currently includes 120 nations and several other private players that have committed to achieving zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- Signatories are responsible for 23% of current greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide and 53% of global GDP.
- **India is not part** of this Alliance.



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding the National Pension System (NPS):

1. The scheme is implemented and regulated under the Ministry of Personnel, Public grievances and Pensions.
2. Any individual citizen of India in the age group of 18-65 years can join NPS.

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

- The Central Government has introduced the **National Pension System (NPS)** with effect from January 2004 (except for armed forces).
- NPS is being **implemented and regulated by Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)** in the country.
 - It works under the Department of Financial Services under the **Ministry of Finance (and not Ministry of Personnel, Public grievances and Pensions)**. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.
 - National Pension System Trust (NPST) established by PFRDA is the registered owner of all assets under NPS
- NPS was made available to all Citizens of India from May 2009.
 - **Any individual citizen of India (both resident and Non-resident) in the age group of 18-65 years can join NPS. hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - However, OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin) card holders and Hindu Undivided

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is a statutory body.
2. IRDAI was constituted on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee report.

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 :C

Explanation

- Following the recommendations of the **Malhotra Committee report**, in 1999, the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA)** was constituted as an autonomous body to regulate and develop the insurance industry. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The IRDA was incorporated as a **statutory body** in April 2000. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The key objectives of the IRDA include the promotion of competition so as to enhance customer satisfaction through increased consumer choice and lower premiums while ensuring the financial security of the insurance market.
- It is headquartered in Hyderabad.

3. What does venture capital mean?

- a. A short-term capital provided to industries
- b. A long-term start-up capital provided to new entrepreneurs
- c. Funds provided to industries at times of incurring losses
- d. Funds provided for replacement and renovation of industries

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Venture capital (VC) is a long-term start-up capital provided to new entrepreneurs.
- VC is an investment fund that is involved in managing money from different investors seeking to provide capital to new entrepreneurs and start-ups that have immense growth potential.

4. Mekedatu dispute, often seen in the news, is a dispute between?

- a. Karnataka & Goa
- b. Tamil Nadu & Karnataka
- c. Puducherry & Tamil Nadu
- d. Andhra Pradesh & Telangana

Answer : b

- *The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Southern Zone has recently appointed a joint committee to look into allegations of unauthorised construction activity taking place in Mekedatu, where the Karnataka government had proposed to construct a dam across the Cauvery River.*

Mekedatu Dispute

- Mekedatu, meaning goat's leap, is a deep gorge situated at the confluence of the rivers Cauvery and Arkavathi, about 100 km from Bengaluru, at the Kanakapura taluk in Karnataka's Ramanagara district.
- In 2013, the then Karnataka Law Minister TB Jayachandra announced the construction of a multi-purpose balancing reservoir project over the Mekedatu.
- The Rs 5,912-crore project aims to alleviate the drinking water problems of Bengaluru and Ramanagara district.
- It is also expected to generate hydro-electricity to meet the power needs of the state.

Tamil Nadu's response

- Soon after the project was announced in 2013, the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalithaa wrote to then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking him not to grant permission or environmental clearance.
- Explaining the potential for damage to the lower riparian state of Tamil Nadu, she said that the project was in violation of the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.

5. With reference to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The agency is allowed to investigate offences committed outside India.
2. NIA can investigate terror cases across the country without having to get permission from the states.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is a central counter-terrorism agency functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- The agency is allowed to investigate offences committed outside India.
- NIA can investigate terror cases across the country without having to get permission from the states.

6. Bubble Curtain Technology to clean water bodies is implemented first time in which of the following Indian Rivers?

- a. River Kaveri
- b. River Tungabhadra
- c. River Yamuna
- d. River Ganga

Answer : c

Bubble Curtain Technology

- A bubble curtain is a system that produces bubbles in a deliberate arrangement in water, it is also called pneumatic barrier.
- The technique is based on bubbles of air (gas) being let out under the water surface, commonly on the bottom.
- When the bubbles rise they act as a barrier, a curtain, breaking the propagation of waves or the spreading of particles and other contaminants.
- This technology is being used for the first time in India to stop plastic from entering the river Yamuna.
- It is a non-invasive solution to stop plastic from entering the oceans, Ships and fish can pass through the air bubbles but plastics will be stopped
- The bubble screen is created by a specially designed air tube which is placed diagonally on the bed of the canal or river.
- It brings waste to the surface channels the plastics onto the banks where it can be extracted.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Making it legally binding to have a fair proportion of women in the elected bodies can ensure political empowerment of women in India. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Write an introduction highlighting the need for political empowerment of women by legally binding representation in elected bodies.
- Highlighting the issue of under representation and existing legislative measures, discuss the issues associated with legally binding representation of women.
- Conclude by summarising your answer and linking political empowerment of women with dimensions of development.

2. The constitution of India makes the Centre stronger than the States and provides a quasi-federal polity. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Enlist the features that make India a federal country.
- Enlist the features of Indian Constitution that reflect an centralising tendency.
- Conclude Suitably