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JUNE

19.06.2021

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. In India, looking beyond the binary to a spectrum

The article talks about the need to grant marriage rights to same-sex couples in India, at the earliest.

Civil Rights for LGBTQIA+ community:

- The **LGBTQIA+ community** is a community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other identities that make up a **diverse group of individuals with varying sexual orientations and gender identities.**
- The last two decades have witnessed **tremendous progress in establishing civil rights** for the LGBTQIA+ community.

International jurisprudence:

Globally, the recognition of the unequal laws discriminating against the LGBTQIA+ community has acted as a **trigger to reform and modernise legal architecture to become more inclusive and equal.**

- As a result of a verdict by the Constitutional Court of **South Africa**, the **Civil Union Act, 2006 was enacted**, enabling the voluntary union of two persons above 18 years of age, by way of marriage.
- In **Australia**, the **Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws - General Law Reform) Act 2008** was enacted to provide equal entitlements for same-sex couples in matters of, inter alia, social security, employment and taxation.
- In **England and Wales**, the **Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013** enabled same-sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies or with religious rites.
- In 2015, the **Supreme Court of the United States decided that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples.** It held the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples to be a grave and continuing harm, serving to disrespect and subordinate gays and lesbians.

Courts and civil rights:

- In India, **marriages are solemnised under personal laws** such as the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872, Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.
- **At present, same-sex and queer marriages are not clearly recognised in India.** However, we are not deprived of judicial guidance.
- **Arunkumar and Sreeja vs The Inspector General of Registration and Ors.**
 - In this case, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court employed the interpretation that the **term 'bride' under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 includes transwomen and intersex persons identifying as women.**
 - Therefore, a **marriage solemnised between a male and a transwoman, both professing the Hindu religion, is deemed to be a valid marriage under the Act.**
 - It expands the scope of a term used in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 in a progressive manner and sets the stage for re-imagining the marriage rights of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Shafin Jahan vs Asokan K.M. and Others (Hadiya case)**
- In this case, the Supreme Court said that the **right to choose and marry a partner was considered to be a constitutionally guaranteed freedom.**
 - SC held that the “intimacies of marriage lie within a core zone of privacy, which is inviolable” and “**society has no role to play in determining our choice of partners**”.
- **From the logical interpretation of these judgements, it is apparent that any legal or statutory bar to same-sex and queer marriages must necessarily be held to be unconstitutional and specifically violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.**

Expanding the scope of marriage:

- The domain of marriages cannot be immune to reform and review.
- **Reform of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 to bring self-respect marriages** under its very umbrella, is seen as a strong move towards **breaking caste-based practices within the institution of marriage.**
 - Self-respect marriages were legalised in Tamil Nadu (later, in Puducherry) through amendments to the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.
 - Self-respect marriages have **done away with priests and religious symbols such as fire or saptapadi.**
 - Solemnisation of such marriages requires only an exchange of rings or garlands or tying of the mangalsutra.
- Similarly, **understanding the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community, the law must expand the institution of marriage to include all gender and sexual identities.**
- At least 29 countries in the world have legalised same-sex marriage.

- It is time for India to review its existing legal architecture in order to legalise marriages irrespective of gender identity and sexual orientation.

2. Cold peace

Context:

US President Joe Biden met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva.

Details:

- The world leaders met for the first time in a decade.
 - They last met when the Russian leader was prime minister and Biden was serving as vice president, in 2011.
- **Relations between the two countries have hit the lowest point** in recent years since the end of the Cold War.
 - The U.S. has accused Russia of **interfering in its elections and launching cyberattacks** and criticised its **stifling of internal dissent**.
 - Russia has slammed **America's interventionist foreign policy**.

History of the U.S.-Russia ties:

- There are **structural issues in the U.S.-Russia ties**.
- When Russia ended its post-Soviet strategic retreat and adopted a more assertive foreign policy under Mr. Putin (partly in response to NATO expansion into eastern Europe) **the West saw it as a threat to its primacy**.
- The **2008 Georgia war** severely affected the relations between democratic Russia and the West.
- In 2014, the annexation of Crimea renewed tensions.
 - Russia was thrown out of the G8, and western sanctions followed.
- Ties hit rock bottom with allegations that **Russian intelligence units carried out cyberattacks and ran an online campaign to get Donald Trump elected President** in the 2016 U.S. election.
- Russia, which had amassed troops on the Ukraine border, sees NATO's expansion into its border region as a threat.

Significance of the meeting:

- All these geopolitical and bilateral issues cannot be resolved in one summit. They can take **measures to prevent relations from worsening**.
- The Geneva summit has **set a pragmatic tone for engagement between the two competing powers**.

- The summit demonstrated a willingness to strengthen engagement and reduce tensions.
- Despite the differences, the **leaders held talks on all critical issues, bringing diplomacy to the centre stage.**
- They have decided to return their Ambassadors to the Embassies.
- They **announced a strategic stability dialogue to discuss terms of arms control measures.**

Way Forward:

- Both countries should be ready to **address their critical concerns.**
- They **must agree to a cold peace**, which would help in **addressing other geopolitical problems such as Syria.**
- **Russia should understand the importance of cooperating with the West.** Permanent hostility with other powers cannot be of much help to Russia.
- The U.S. should be **less pessimistic about Russia's foreign policy goals.** Russia, despite its weakened economic status, remains a great power.

Conclusion:

The message from Geneva is that the leaders wanted to establish rules of engagement so that the countries can **better address their differences and seek common ground on issues of mutual interest.** With some predictability in ties with Russia, Mr. Biden can **strengthen his China-focused foreign policy.** And with a less hostile America, **Mr. Putin can retain Russian influence in its backyard.**

3. Twitter grilled by MPs over violation of new IT rules

Context:

Social media giant **Twitter was questioned by members of the Standing Committee on Information and Technology for non-compliance with the new IT rules.**

Background:

- Information Technology (Guidelines For Intermediaries And Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 was enacted by the government in February 2021.
- Several concerns had been raised by the social media platforms with respect to the new IT Rules.

- Twitter has not yet accepted the new IT rules which came into force in May 2021.
- Even after the three months of issuance of the new IT rules, which had asked to set up a grievance redressal system, **Twitter didn't comply with the latest IT Rules.**

Details:

- Twitter India representatives were questioned on a range of issues pertaining to its **failure to appoint a full-time compliance officer and its claims of being an intermediary despite manipulating content on its site**, which would put it in the category of a publisher.
- Twitter accepted that **it differentiates between tweets – promoting the healthy ones and suppressing the harmful.**
- It also accepted that **it gives priority to its own laid down policies over the law of the land in cases of conflict**, leading the panel to conclude that this is a gross violation of the IT Act, 2000.

The Social Media platforms, in the instance of non-compliance with the new IT Rules, will have to face huge repercussions. Their **intermediary status will be taken off** and therefore, they will be **liable for criminal action.**

4. Fair assessment

The article talks about **student evaluations amidst the ongoing pandemic.**

Issue:

- **Student evaluation has become a challenge in all countries**, in the current pandemic situation.
- Many have **opted for a hybrid system of school-level internal assessments** combined with any examinations that may have been held.
- As the **course of the pandemic remains uncertain**, developing a continuous assessment system in schools for 2021-22 and beyond has become a necessity.

Context:

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has announced the **marks tabulation framework for Class 12 students.**

Class 12 Evaluation Framework:

- The framework was evolved by CBSE to fulfil a Supreme Court mandate.
- It encompasses **three assessment years starting with Class 10**.
- It **distributes score weightage** across the **Class 10 public examination**, the **Class 11 annual test**, and the **Class 12 school tests** in a **30:30:40 ratio** for theory, and actual score for internal assessment and practicals.
 - This aims to **level out any irregular phase in a student's performance**.
- The marks considered from Class 10 will be the **average of the best three subjects among five**.
- A provision has been made to take a Class 12 public examination at a later date to attain a higher score when the pandemic has subsided.
- The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) has also developed a similar system.

Challenges:

- There are some challenges to uniformly implementing the CBSE plan.
- Its success is dependent on the **approach of school result committees responsible for the inclusion of Class 12 marks**.
 - Uneven access to devices and online connectivity, with an impact on scores or even resulting in non-appearance, must be resolved by the result committees.
- There is then the issue of fraud.
 - In the U.K., reports indicate that **influential parents** exerted pressure on schools to give their wards **an unfair hike in grades in a similar mixed evaluation system**.

Way Forward:

- For fairness, CBSE mandates the **participation of external members on the result committees**, but it will take **utmost transparency to dispel students' apprehensions**.
- A dependable dispute resolution process must be established.
- The CBSE has taken the lead on this, and State Boards must follow a similar pattern for student evaluations without further delay.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Panel formed for talks on theatre commands

Context:

A high-level committee has been formed for wider consultations on the creation of integrated tri-service theatre commands.

Details:

- The panel includes the **Vice-Chiefs of the three services, the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and representatives from Ministries** such as Home Affairs, Finance and Law.
- Some aspects like **bringing in paramilitary forces, which are under the Home Ministry, under the purview of the theatre commands and financial implications that may arise in the process of integration** has necessitated the move.

Mandate of the committee:

- The committee will **examine all issues and find a way forward** before a **formal note** on their creation is **sent to the Cabinet Committee on Security**.
- The issue is about **fine-tuning the proposals and forming a consensus on the integrated tri-service theatre commands**.

Integrated Theatre Commands

- There are about 19 military commands in the country and only two of them are tri-service commands – Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command, which looks after nuclear assets.
- Instead of having separate commands for every service, **the CDS is working on having a joint or theatre command that can carry out all war-fighting formations under a single commander**.
- The commander could either be from the Army, Air Force or the Navy.
- **Theaterisation means putting specific units of personnel from the three services – Army, Navy and Air Force – under a common theatre commander so they fight as a cohesive unit.**
 - Both the US and China follow a theatre command doctrine.

Note:

- It is a part of reforms carried out after the **formation of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)**.
- The mandate of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) includes **bringing about jointness among the three services**, including through the establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- The country's first CDS Gen. Bipin Rawat had **constituted teams headed by the Vice-Chiefs of three services to study and submit recommendations on the formation of various commands**.

- Also, two proposed commands: air defence and maritime theatre are being discussed.
 - The proposed **Air Defence Command** plans to integrate all air assets of the armed forces.
 - The **Maritime Theatre Command** plans to bring in all assets of the Navy, Coast Guard as well as coastal formations of the Army and Air Force under one umbrella.
 - On land, the Army's Northern Command and Western Command would be converted into two to five theatre commands.

6. Sale of illegal HTBt cotton seeds doubles

Context:

The **illegal cultivation of herbicide-tolerant (HT) Bt cotton** has seen a huge jump in 2021.

Issues:

- Seed manufacturers claim that the sale of illegal seed packets has more than doubled from 30 lakh in 2020 to 75 lakh in 2021.
- The illegal seeds are sold using the brand name of prominent companies.
- Farmers are at risk with such illegal cotton seed sale as there is no accountability of the quality of seed; it pollutes the environment.
- The industry is losing legitimate seed sale.
- The government is losing revenue in terms of tax collection.

Cultivation of the genetically modified cotton variant has **serious environmental and economic consequences**.

Bt Cotton and HTBT Cotton

- **Bt cotton is the only transgenic crop that has been approved by the Centre for commercial cultivation in India.**
 - It has been **genetically modified to produce an insecticide to combat the cotton bollworm** (a common pest).
- The **HTBt cotton variant adds another layer of modification**. It makes the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate. This has **not been approved by regulators**.
 - It is feared that **glyphosate has a carcinogenic effect**.
 - **The unchecked spread of herbicide resistance to nearby plants through pollination could create a variety of superweeds.**

Way Forward:

- Genetic modification could bring about changes that can be harmful to humans in the long run. GM crops must be released commercially **only after their long-lasting effects are studied.**
- In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body that allows for the commercial release of GM crops.
 - Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act, 1989.
- The Centre has made the policy to ban this variant. The **State governments must take action.**
- HT seed sales are carried mostly by unorganised and fly by night operators. **Action must be taken to stop such sales and punish offenders.**

7. India, 3 EU nations begin naval exercise

What's In News?

The Indian Navy and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) exercise began in the Gulf of Aden.

Details:

- It is the **first joint naval exercise** between the Indian Navy and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR).
 - European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR) is the EU's **counter-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia.**
- Countries participating in the exercise are **India, Italy, Spain and France.**
- The two-day exercise will see **high tempo-naval operations at sea**, including **advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises, cross deck helicopter operations, tactical manoeuvres, boarding operations, underway replenishment, Search & Rescue, Man Overboard drills, and other maritime security operations.**
- Five warships from four navies are participating in the exercise.
- **Indian Naval Ship Trikand** – mission deployed for Anti-Piracy Operations is participating in the exercise.

EUNAVFOR and India:

- **Under the charter of the World Food Programme (UN WFP), EUNAVFOR and the Indian Navy converge on multiple issues including counter-piracy operations and protection of vessels deployed.**

- Indian Navy and EUNAVFOR also have regular interaction through **SHADE (Shared Awareness and De-confliction) meetings held annually in Bahrain.**

Note:

- At the same time, a **virtual information-sharing exercise is also being conducted** between the **Indian Navy Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** and **Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa.**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. How poll results are challenged, and when courts have set them aside

West Bengal CM has filed an election petition in the Calcutta High Court challenging the Assembly election result of Nandigram constituency, where she had contested and lost.

What is an election petition?

- The Election Commission's role ends with the declaration of results, that is once the Returning Officer has signed the final result sheet (Form 20).
- After that, an election petition is the only legal remedy available to a voter or a candidate who believes there has been malpractice in an election.
- Such a person can challenge the result through an election petition submitted to the High Court of the state in which the constituency is located.
- Such a petition has to be filed within 45 days from the date of the poll results; nothing is entertained by courts after that.
- Although the Representative of the People Act of 1951 suggests that the High Court should try to conclude the trial within six months, it usually drags on for much longer, even years.

On what grounds can an election petition be filed?

Under Section 100 of the RP Act, an election petition can be filed on the grounds that:

- On the day of the election, the winning candidate was not qualified to contest.
- The winning candidate, his poll agent or any other person with the consent of the winning candidate has indulged in a corrupt practice. Section 123 of the RP Act has a detailed list of what amounts to corrupt practice, including bribery, use of force or coercion, appeal to vote or refrain from voting on grounds of religion, race, community, and language.
- Improper acceptance of the nomination of the winning candidate or improper rejection of a nomination.
- Malpractice in the counting process, which includes improper reception, refusal or rejection of any vote, or the reception of any vote which is void.
- Non-compliance with the provisions of the Constitution or the RP Act or any rules or orders made under the RP Act.

What happens if the court finds that a contention of malpractice is correct?

- This depends on relief that is claimed by the petitioner in her election petition.
- Under Section 84 of the RP Act, the petitioner may ask that the results of all or the winning candidates may be declared void.
- In addition to that, the petitioner may also ask the court to declare her (in case the petition is filed by a candidate) or any other candidate as the winner or duly elected.
- So the verdict on an election petition, if found in favour of the petitioner, may result in a fresh election or the court announcing a new winner.

Have there been any election results that were declared void because of an election petition?

- There are many examples, the most famous being the Allahabad High Court verdict of 1975 which set aside Indira Gandhi's election from Rae Bareli constituency, four years earlier, on grounds of corrupt practice.
- The election petition was filed by her nearest rival Raj Narain who had lost by over one lakh votes.
- The High Court found that Indira Gandhi's election agent Yashpal Kapur, the DM of Rae Bareli, the Superintendent of Police of Rae Bareli and the Home Secretary of UP government helped in the arrangements for her election tour.
- This amounted to a corrupt practice under Section 123 (7) of the RP Act.

2. ECI releases an Atlas on General Elections 2019

The Election Commission of India has released 'General Elections 2019 - An Atlas'.

Atlas on General Elections

- The Atlas encompasses all the data and statistical figures of this monumental event. It shares interesting facts, anecdotes and legal provisions related to the Indian elections.
- It brings out salient features such as data of the 23 States and Uts where women voting percentage was more than the male voting percentage.
- It has information about the largest & smallest parliamentary constituency in terms of electors, candidates and performance of political parties amongst other parameters.
- The Atlas depicts the elector's data in different categories and through various comparison charts like Elector Gender Ratio and electors in different age categories.
- This Atlas serves as an informative and illustrative document that brings to light the nuances of the Indian electoral process and empowers readers to analyze trends and changes.

Data on 2019 Elections

- The 2019 General Elections witnessed the lowest gender gap in the history of Indian elections.
- The Elector Gender Ratio which has shown a positive trend since 1971 was 926 in the 2019 General Elections.
- The Atlas also compares the average number of electors per polling station in different states during the 2014 & 2019 General Elections.
- The Election Commission of India set up over 10 lakh polling stations in General Elections 2019 with the lowest number of electors per polling station (365) in Arunachal Pradesh.

Why was such Atlas needed?

- Since the first General Elections in 1951-52, the Commission has been publishing a compilation of electoral data in the form of narrative and statistical books.
- 17th General Elections conducted in 2019 were the largest democratic exercise in human history which witnessed the participation of 61.468 crore voters at 10.378 lakh polling stations spread over 32 lakh sq km.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. Indian Certification of Medical Devices (ICMED) Plus Scheme

The Quality Council of India (QCI), and the Association of Indian Manufacturers of Medical Devices (AiMeD) have added further features to the ICMED Scheme for Certification of Medical Devices.

ICMED 13485 PLUS

- The ICMED 13485 PLUS, as the new scheme has been christened, will undertake verification of the quality, safety and efficacy of medical devices.
- It was first launched in 2016.
- It has been designed to integrate the Quality Management System components and product-related quality validation processes through witness testing of products with reference to the defined product standards and specifications.
- This is the first scheme around the world in which quality management systems along with product certification standards are integrated with regulatory requirements.
- This scheme will be an end-to-end quality assurance scheme for the medical devices sector in India.

Details of the scheme

- This scheme provides the much-needed institutional mechanism for assuring product quality and safety.
- It will go a long way in assisting the procurement agencies to tackle the challenges relating to the menace of counterfeit products and fake certification.
- This will also help in eliminating the circulation and use of sub-standard medical products or devices of doubtful origin that could prove to be serious health hazards.

4. World Competitiveness Ranking 2021

India's position has remained unchanged at 43 for the third year in a row in the World Competitiveness Ranking by Switzerland-based Institute for Management Development (IMD).

World Competitiveness Ranking

- The IMD World Competitiveness Ranking ranks 64 economies and assesses the extent to which a country promotes the prosperity of its people by measuring economic well-being through hard data and survey responses from executives.
- The ranking examines four factors – economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency, and infrastructure.
- The top-performing economies are characterized by varying degrees of investment in innovation, diversified economic activities, and supportive public policy.

India's performance

- Among the BRICS nations, India is ranked second after China (16), followed by Russia (45th), Brazil (57th) and South Africa (62th).
- Among the four indices used, India's ranking in government efficiency increased to 46 from 50 a year ago, while its ranking in other parameters such as economic performance (37), business efficiency (32) and infrastructure (49) remained the same.
- India has maintained its position for the past three years but this year, it had significant improvements in government efficiency.

5. Discoms need radical intervention not financial aid package

Frequent rescue packages for discoms

- Recently, there was a sharp decline in the dues owed by power distribution companies, discoms, to power generating companies.
- Discoms have paid off their dues in part by **drawing down a liquidity facility** arranged by the Centre last year.
- This rescue package was arranged to prevent the entire power sector chain from suffering because of the **discoms' inability to meet their obligations**.
- In the initial years after the introduction of UDAY some states did, in fact, **witness an improvement in their financial and operational indicators**.
- But it wasn't sustained, There has been a sharp deterioration in several parameters.

Low performance of Discoms

1) On the basis of AT&C losses

- A key metric to measure the performance of discoms is **AT&C losses**.
- The UDAY scheme had envisaged bringing down these losses to **15 per cent by 2019**.
- However, as per data on the UDAY dashboard, the AT&C losses **currently stand at 21.7 per cent at the all-India level**.
- In the case of the **low-income north and central-eastern states** – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh – the losses are considerably higher.

2) On the basis of cost and revenue per unit

- On another metric – the gap between discoms' costs and revenues – the difference, supposed to have been eliminated by now, **stands at Rs 0.49 per unit** in the absence of regular and commensurate tariff hikes.
- For the **high-income southern states** of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, **this gap between costs and revenues is significantly higher**.

What are the factors responsible for inefficiencies?

1) Electrification push without cost restructuring

- The government's push for ensuring electrification of all have contributed to **greater inefficiency**.
- To support higher levels of electrification, cost structures need to be reworked, and the distribution network would need to be augmented – **in the absence of all this, losses are bound to rise**.

2) Economic fallout of the pandemic

- With demand from **industrial and commercial users** falling, revenue from this stream, which is used to **cross-subsidise other consumers**, has declined, exacerbating the stress on discom finances.
- A turnaround in the economy will provide some relief, but will not form the basis of a sustained improvement in finances.

3) Lack of consumer data and metering

- Even six years after UDAY was launched, various levels in the distribution chain – the feeder, the distribution transformer (DT) and the consumer – have not been fully metered.

- As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the level in the chain where losses are occurring.
- Other than discoms in metros like Delhi and Mumbai, there is also **limited data on which consumer is attached to which DT.**
- This lack of data makes it difficult to isolate and identify loss-making areas and **take corrective action.**

4) No tariff hike

- The continuing absence of political consensus at the state level **to raise tariffs** or to bring down AT&C losses signal a lack of resolve to tackle the issues plaguing the sector.

Way forward

- One of the solution centres around a **national power distribution company.**
- Another option is to **deduct discom dues**, owed to both public and private power generating companies, **from state balances with the RBI** forcing states to take the necessary steps to fix discom finances.
- The Centre has **linked additional state borrowings to the completion of distribution reforms** to incentivise states to act.

Conclusion

Short of radical measures – privatisation remains a chimera – it is difficult to see how a sustainable turnaround in the financial and operational position of discoms can be engineered. As the amounts involved rise, minor tinkering isn't likely to produce the desired results.

6. Exercise EUNAVFOR

Indian Navy is participating in the maiden IN – EUNAVFOR Joint Naval Exercise in the Gulf of Aden.

Exercise EUNAVFOR

- EUNAVFOR is a multilateral naval exercise comprising of Italian Navy, Spanish Navy, and French Navy.

- Ships of the four navies will endeavor to enhance and hone their war-fighting skills and their ability as an integrated force to promote, peace, security, and stability in the maritime domain.
- EUNAVFOR and the Indian Navy converge on multiple issues including counter-piracy operations and protection of vessels deployed under the charter of the World Food Programme (UN WFP).
- Indian Navy and EUNAVFOR also have regular interaction through SHADE (Shared Awareness and De-confliction) meetings held annually in Bahrain.
- This engagement showcases increased levels of synergy, coordination, and inter-operability between India and EUNAVFOR.
- It also underscores the shared values as partner navies, in ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive and rules-based international order.



Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):

1. BIS is not a member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).
2. The BIS represents India in the International Electro-technical Commission (IEC).

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 **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** is the National Standard Body of India for the harmonious development of the activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods.
- **BIS is a founder member of ISO (International Organization for Standardization)** and is actively involved in the development of International Standards. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- **India is represented in IEC (International Electro-technical Commission) through BIS. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - IEC is the world's leading organization for the preparation and publication of International Standards for all electrical, electronic and related technologies.

2. Which of the following connects the South China Sea with the Pacific Ocean?

- a. Strait of Malacca
- b. Sunda Strait
- c. Luzon Strait
- d. Gulf of Thailand

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Luzon Strait is the strait between Taiwan and Luzon island of the Philippines.
- The strait connects the Philippine Sea to the South China Sea in the western Pacific Ocean.
- Therefore, the Luzon Strait connects the South China Sea with the Pacific Ocean.

3. The United Nation (UN) designates specific decades as occasions to mark particular events. Which of the following is *not* observed for the decade 2021-2030?

- a. UN Decade of Healthy Ageing
- b. UN Decade of Indigenous Languages
- c. UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
- d. UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

Answer : b

- *2022–2032: International Decade of Indigenous Languages*

2021–2030

- Second Decade of Action for Road Safety
- United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing
- United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
- United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

4. 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme is related to

- a. Environmental cess on polluters
- b. Direct tax dispute resolution
- c. Settling medical insurance claims
- d. Resolving GST related disputes

Answer: b

Explanation:

- 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme is related to direct tax dispute resolution.

- The Vivad Se Vishwas scheme was announced by Union Finance Minister during the budget speech on February 1, 2020.
- The scheme aims to end litigation and legacy disputes under the direct taxes category.
- The entities who opt for the scheme must pay a requisite tax following which all litigation against them would be closed by the tax department and penal proceedings dropped.

5. Consider the following statements with respect to Woolly Flying Squirrel

1. It is a rarest mammal, endemic to Western Ghats.
2. It is listed as endangered species under IUCN Red list.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are *incorrect*?

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

Answer : a

Woolly Flying Squirrel

- The woolly squirrel is typically found within the rugged Himalayan habitat that's situated at an altitude of 16,000 feet.
- For much of the 20th century, it had been thought to be extinct, until it had been rediscovered in 1994 in northern Pakistan.
- Scientists have discovered two new species of woolly flying squirrel, namely Tibetan woolly flying squirrel (*Eupetaurus tibetensis*) and also the Yunnan woolly flying squirrel (*Eupetaurus nivamons*).

6. "Strategy 2030" is associated with which of the following?

- a. World Bank
- b. New Development Bank
- c. Asian Development Bank
- d. Asian Infrastructure & Investment Bank

Answer : c

Strategy 2030

- It sets the course for Asian Development Bank's (ADBs) efforts to respond effectively to the Asia and Pacific region's changing needs.
- Under Strategy 2030, ADB will expand its vision to achieve a **prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific**, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB), established in 1966, is owned by 68 members – 49 from the region.



MAINS PRACTICES QUESTIONS

1Q. What is meant by 'Peri-Urban Agriculture'? How can it help in adapting to the challenges posed by climate change? (250 words)

Approach

- Describe 'Peri-Urban Agriculture'.
- Elaborate on its benefits in dealing with climate change.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. Discuss how the Shraman tradition marked the beginning of new religious and social movements in ancient India? (150 words)

Approach

- In the introduction briefly explain Shramanas and explain how they were different from existing brahmanical order.
- In the body, discuss in detail about the new social and religious movement brought about by the Shramanas traditions.
- In conclusion, mention the long term impacts of Shramanic traditions.