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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Doval, Pak. NSA to attend SCO meet in Dushanbe next week

Context:

- The scheduled **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting**, of the **“Secretaries of the Security Council”** in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Details:

- The participation of the National Security Advisers of India and Pakistan is expected in the meeting. The SCO meeting comes in the light of **India and Pakistan taking a series of decisions to defuse tensions** between the two neighbours aided by back-channel dialogue.
 - Example- The announcement of a **ceasefire agreement at the Line of Control**.
- The presence of senior security officials from India and China is also of significance, given the **continuing standoff at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh between India and China**.
- The meeting will set the course for the **annual “Regional Anti-Terror Structure” mechanism joint exercises by SCO member troops**, to be held in Pakistan in 2021.
- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the SCO which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the **three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism**

2. ‘Delta plus’ and an emerging public health threat

Context:

- Concerns around the world and in India about **‘Delta plus’ variant of the SARS- CoV-2**

Background:

Delta plus variant:

- Formally known as **1 or B.1.617.2.1**, the Delta plus is an emerging form of the Delta variant (B.1.617.2).
- It has an **additional mutation called K417N**, which has previously been identified in the Beta variant and the Gamma variant.
 - This **mutation in the virus's spike protein** facilitates entry into human host cells.
 - The spike protein, an important component of the coronavirus, stimulates the virus's entrance into human cells and causes infection.
- It is **currently a "variant of interest"**, and hasn't been classified as a "variant of concern" yet in the World Health Organization's list.
- Research is on to understand its transmissibility, virulence.

Concerns:

High number of mutations:

- The **Delta variant has a number of mutations** that have allowed it to **dominate in several countries**, thus posing new challenges to the management of the pandemic.

High infectiveness:

- The K417N mutation found in the Beta variant and the Gamma variant has been **characterised as being highly infectious** and thus there are the **concerns of a new wave** associated with this variant.
 - In the light of a recent spike in positivity rate in some districts of Maharashtra and the increase in the delta plus variants recorded from these districts experts have warned that Delta plus variant might be the reason behind a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of the vaccines on the new variant:

- Given the fact that the delta plus variant has significant differences compared to the strain that has been used by pharma companies to design vaccines, there are **doubts being expressed on whether the existing vaccines would be effective against the delta plus variant**.
- Studies to determine the potency of Covishield and Covaxin against the Delta variant have indicated that while antibodies continued to be produced against the variant, they were **fewer antibodies produced** than those produced against the strain used by companies to prepare their vaccines.

Render monoclonal antibody treatment ineffective:

- A major concern with the AY.1 is the presence of the K417N mutation. Previous studies have associated the mutation **with resistance to the newly developed monoclonal antibody treatment drug, Casirivimab and Imdevimab.**
- The mutation presumably allows the new variant to “**escape**” antibodies in the monoclonal antibody treatment regimes.

3. A Cold War relic that's seeking a new purpose

Context:

- The **2021 Brussels summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).**
 - A NATO summit is the gathering of the leaders of NATO's 30 member countries.

Background:

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an **intergovernmental political and military alliance between 30 European and North American countries.**
 - NATO happens to be the world's largest military alliance.
- It is based on the **Washington Treaty or North Atlantic Treaty** which was signed in 1949 by 12 founding members.
 - NATO's essential and enduring purpose is to **safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means.**
 - **Collective defence** is the major aspect of the Treaty and is enshrined in Article 5, whereby the member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
 - The collective defence principle states that “an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies”.
- **The Soviet Union's imposition of the Berlin blockade of 1948-49** and the support to the coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 galvanized the war-ravaged European nations to come together under an American security blanket as a **counter to the Soviet Union's communist expansion in the region.** The formation of NATO, and its Soviet counterpart, the **Warsaw Pact, in 1955,** marked the beginning of the **Cold War era.**
- Originally formed by 12 Allied powers to counter the massive Soviet armies stationed in Eastern and Central Europe after the Second World War, the membership and mandate of the organization has increased over the years. **Starting with 12 founding countries, NATO currently has 30 members.**
- **NATO's Headquarters is located in Brussels, Belgium.**

Details:

- Major topics under discussion included NATO's role in the **changing geostrategic environment** and concrete measures to adapt the Alliance, as part of the **NATO 2030 agenda**.
- At the NATO Summit, the NATO Leaders took decisions on a wide range of topics to address the current and future security challenges. This included **Russia's pattern of aggressive behaviour, terrorism, cyberattacks and disruptive technologies, the rise of China, and the security implications of climate change**.

Concerns:

Source of concern for US and Russia bilateral relations and its implications:

- Tensions with Russia have been an inevitable outcome of **NATO's bid to expand eastward** into what Russia considers its sphere of influence.
 - NATO's membership today stands at 30, having added 14 members between 1999 and 2020.
- The move to bring countries such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova under NATO has led to a **confrontation with Russia**.
- Russia in a move which it claims sought to protect its interests, **annexed Crimea and has stationed its troops in Georgia and Moldova**. This has increased concerns over escalation of tensions in the region further.

Potential source of conflict between the US and China:

- In the latest communiqué issued following the recent summit, **NATO for the first time, explicitly described China as a security risk**. The communiqué notes China's stated ambitions and assertive behaviour as presenting systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to NATO alliance's security.
- **The U.S. is trying to push NATO to take a stronger position towards China** in line with the U.S.'s growing conviction of China being a threat to its global supremacy and need for it to be contained.
- China has reacted strongly against this observation and has warned against artificially creating confrontations.
- Academicians have pointed that unlike the Soviet Union, China offers no alternative vision of society that should make Western capitalism insecure and view the U.S. led policy as nothing but **regressive policy based on American exceptionalism**. This could only lead to **increased confrontation**.
- **The paradigm shift of NATO's mandate from collective defence**, which implied a known adversary, **to collective security**, which is open-ended, and might require action against any number of threats, including unknown ones

and non-state actors does not augur well for global peace and security and could render the NATO liable to misuse for vested interests.

Differences between the member nations:

- The continued persistence of NATO could be the fact that it has been a mutually beneficial arrangement for the members. The NATO alliance offers security to European member countries, while for the U.S., it has been an vehicle for power-projection around the world
 - The European members have been able to enjoy absolute security at a cheap price in exchange for a marginal loss in autonomy.
 - For the U.S., NATO has been a vehicle for power-projection around the world including in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The US views NATO as a tool to ensure the primacy of American interests across the globe. It has been able to get its NATO allies to be part of the US's wars in Afghanistan, Iraq by getting them to send troops and invest resources.
- Recent years have witnessed some **differences between the member nations.**
 - **The sharing of the burden of financial resources** between the member nations has been an area of friction between the U.S. and the European states as the US bears nearly 70% of NATO's bills. Some members do not send troops to conflict outside Europe and most contribute less than their share of financial resources
 - There has been growing **differences between the increasingly assertive European member nations and the U.S.** with European nations being wary of being dragged into confrontations that may necessarily not serve Europe's interests.
 - For example, with respect to the recent NATO communiqué, both **France and Germany have sought to distance themselves from NATO's official position on China.** NATO's European member states have sought to underplay the security threat posed by China in the North Atlantic region and view China as only an economic rival and adversary.

4. Ebola outbreak in Guinea is over: WHO

Ebola:

- Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a **rare but severe, often fatal illness** in humans.
- It **affects humans and nonhuman primates**, such as monkeys, gorillas and chimpanzees.
- It is thought that **fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are natural Ebola virus hosts.**

- Ebola is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals such as fruit bats, chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, forest antelope or porcupines found ill or dead or in the rainforest. Ebola then spreads through human-to-human transmission humans through contact with bodily fluids such as blood.
- **The 2014–2016 outbreak in West Africa** was the largest Ebola outbreak since the virus was first discovered in 1976. The outbreak started in **Guinea** and then moved across land borders to **Sierra Leone and Liberia**.
- The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%.
- **Vaccines to protect against Ebola have been developed** and have been used to help control the spread of Ebola outbreaks.

Context:

- The World Health Organization officially announced the **end of Guinea's second Ebola outbreak**.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. The debate around gain-of-function research

Context:

- With the re-emergence of the lab-leak origin theory for the SARS-CoV-2, questions are being raised on gain-of-function research.
 - The Wuhan Institute of Virology was said to have conducted gain-of-function research on coronaviruses.

Gain-of-function research:

- Gain of function research is medical research that **deliberately alters an organism in a way that increases its pathogenesis, transmissibility, or host range**.
- Gain-of-function research involves altering a gene, or introducing a mutation in a pathogen to **study its transmissibility, virulence and immunogenicity**.
 - When mutations occur, they alter the structure of the virus resulting in altered functions.

Significance:

- The gain of function research **helps better understand the functioning of the virus** and helps identify possible targets for **development of vaccines and therapeutics** against the virus.
- The study gains all the more significance given the **increasing incidence of 'escape mutants', i.e., drug-resistant strains**. This necessitates the continual need to develop new antiviral drugs and additional options, such as immunotherapy.
- The gain of function research provides valuable insights into better predicting of emerging infectious diseases and ways to control the disease better in future. Thus it involves a more **proactive approach to tackling future pandemics** and helps keep science and governments battle-ready for future pandemics.

Concerns:

- Gain-of-function research involves **genetic engineering of virus**. The **long term impact of such human intervention** remains uncertain.
- Gain-of-function research involves manipulations that **make certain pathogenic microbes more deadly or more transmissible**. Thus some form of gain of function research carries inherent biosafety and biosecurity risks, and are thus also referred to as dual use research of concern (DURC).
 - **Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC)** is life sciences research that, based on current understanding, can be reasonably anticipated to provide knowledge, information, products, or technologies that could be directly misapplied to pose a significant threat with broad potential consequences to public health and safety.
- In case of gain-of-function research, there is the **potential to cause harm through accidental or deliberate escape of the altered pathogens from labs**.
- Such research also raises **ethical concerns** because of the potential risk posed by virulent pathogen to people.

Recommendations:

- Further research in this domain should be backed by **an objective risk-benefit analysis**. The studies should gauge whether the benefits of conducting such research outweigh the risk of pathogens escaping from labs.
- There should be **responsible use of life sciences research**, focusing on **mitigation and prevention of biorisks**.
- All possible steps need to be taken to ensure the safety of the procedure. The **WHO must develop a Global Guidance Framework** for member states to follow in this direction. This should provide operational guidance on the containment of biohazards and levels of biosafety that all institutions

involved in research, development and handling of these microorganisms must comply with.

- To mitigate the associated risks while allowing the benefits of such research, various governments have mandated that DURC experiments be **regulated under additional oversight by designated institutions and government agencies**. This approach needs to be adopted in every country.
- There is the need to ensure **greater transparency** about such research given that unnecessary secrecy over such research makes it liable for misuse. There should be broader community engagement/consultation, and more transparent GOFR decision- and policy-making.

Additional information:

- In India, all activities related to genetically engineered organisms or cells and hazardous microorganisms and products are regulated as per the “**Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells Rules, 1989**”.

6. Are your staple rice and wheat losing their nutrients?

Context:

- A recent study notes **the depleting trends of essential nutrients in rice and wheat cultivated in India**.

Details:

- The study notes that the currently produced rice and wheat grains are not having the same density of essential nutrients as those cultivated 50 years ago.
- There has been a **depleting trend in grain density of zinc and iron in rice and wheat** cultivated in India over the years.

Possible reasons:

Dilution effect:

- ‘Dilution effect’ is caused by **decreased nutrient concentration in response to higher grain yield**. This is due to the fact that the rate of yield increase is not compensated by the rate of nutrient take-up by the plants.

Decreased quantity of nutrients in soil:

- The increasing use of **monoculture cropping patterns and intensive agricultural practices** could have resulted in a scenario where the **soils supporting plants could be low in plant-available nutrients**.

Concerns:

- The lack of essential micronutrients like Zinc and iron in Rice and Wheat could **adversely affect the nutritional security of billions of people globally**.
 - Rice and wheat constitute the staple food for over half of the global population.
 - Countries like India which continue to battle micronutrient deficiency have diets composed mainly of rice, wheat, corn, and barley. The growing of newer cultivars of rice and wheat **cannot be a sustainable option to alleviate zinc and iron malnutrition** in Indian population.

Recommendations:

Biofortification:

- Apart from the initiatives such as **providing micro nutrient supplementation pills to school children**, there is also the need to concentrate options like biofortification.
 - Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
 - **Biofortification is the process by which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through agronomic practices, conventional plant breeding, or modern biotechnology**. It involves the breeding of food crops that are rich in micronutrients.
 - Biofortification differs from conventional fortification in that biofortification aims to increase nutrient levels in crops during plant growth rather than through manual means during processing of the crops.
 - Examples of biofortification projects include:
 - **iron-biofortification of rice**, beans, sweet potato, cassava and legumes;
 - **zinc-biofortification of wheat, rice**, beans, sweet potato and maize;
 - provitamin A carotenoid-biofortification of sweet potato, maize and cassava; and

- amino acid and protein-biofortification of sorghum and cassava.
- The future breeding programmes of new cultivars should **focus on improving the grain ionome (nutritional make-up)** as a remedy to the observed trend of depleting micronutrient levels.

Sustainable agricultural practices:

- Given the ill effects of mono culture practices and intensive agricultural practices backed by intensive fertilizer usage, there is the need for moving towards more sustainable agricultural practices like **organic farming, multi cropping and permanent agriculture** which accord the necessary attention towards the **overall health of the soil**.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Improving Employability of the Youth

In news

- Recently, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and UNICEF have signed a Statement of Intent to improve employment outcomes for the youth in India.
- It intends to provide a platform for cooperation between the Ministry and UNICEF to leverage the existing mainstreamed initiatives

Areas of Collaboration

- Connecting young people with employment opportunities.
- Upskilling in skill areas like life skills, financial skills, digital skills, vocations skills etc.
- Strengthening National Career Service (NCS).
- Support in Job forecasting by exploring the gaps.
- Supporting direct dialogue between youth and policy stakeholders.

National Career Service (NCS)

- It was launched in 2015, within the umbrella of the e-governance plan.
- It is a one-stop solution that provides a wide array of employment and career related services to the citizens of India.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- **Three Pillars:**
 - A well designed ICT based portal NCS portal,
 - Country wide set up of Model Career Centers
 - Interlinkage with all the states through employment exchanges.

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

Context:

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee 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's the issue?

She has sought that Suvendhu Adhikari's election be declared void on grounds of corrupt practice and discrepancies in the counting procedure conducted by **the Returning Officer**.

What is an election petition?

Post results, an election petition is **the only legal remedy available to a voter or a candidate who believes there has been malpractice in an election**.

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.

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

1. **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.
2. **Improper acceptance** of the nomination of the winning candidate or improper rejection of a nomination.
3. **Malpractice** in the counting process, which includes improper reception, refusal or rejection of any vote, or the reception of any vote which is void.
4. **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?

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.

Famous examples:

- There are many examples, the most famous being the Allahabad High Court verdict of 1975 which set aside Indira Gandhi's election from Rae Bareilly constituency, four years earlier, on grounds of corrupt practice.
- Another high-profile case was that of Congress leader C P Joshi's loss in the Rajasthan Assembly elections in 2008, by one vote.

3. Child Labour & Pandemic

Context: This year is supposed to be the International Year for Elimination of Child Labour, whereby countries and networks come together in committing themselves to address the root causes of child labour.

Some of the root causes of Child Labour are

- Poverty
- Social marginalisation,
- Lack of alternative or safe livelihoods for parents
- Adequate child protection mechanisms
- Lack of quality education.

Pandemic, Education and Child Labour

- **School Closures pushing Children into Labour:** With 1.5 million schools closed for the last one year and more. In 2021, says UNESCO, 24 million

children may not find their way back to schools after the pandemic. Any child who is not in school is a potential child labourer

- **Child Marriages:** India witnessed an increase in the number of child marriages since 2020. Girls are further at risk – married off early, these child brides are also often child labourers. Save The Children puts half a million more girls at risk of early marriage
- **Abuse & Trafficking:** Closure of schools and pandemic induced poverty has increased the vulnerability of children especially the girl child to abuse and trafficking
- **Reduced Education Budget:** Despite knowing the impact of Pandemic on education system & thus on Children’s future, the Union budget has Rs 5,000 crore less to spend on education for children this year.

Way Ahead

There has to be relentlessly campaigns for

- Increased allocation for education, at least 6% of GDP,★
- Better infrastructure in primary schools
- Inclusion of breakfast along with mid-day meals
- Remedial measures for loss of learning
- Transfer of monies to vulnerable states and local governments on a priority basis.

4. Recusal of Judges:

Context:

Justice Indira Banerjee has recused herself from hearing a petition filed by the families of two BJP activists killed allegedly in the post poll violence in West Bengal.

Background:

The petition alleged that there was “indiscriminate” killing of innocent people in West Bengal following the election results by the “vengeful” ruling party in the State.

What is Judicial Disqualification or Recusal?

Judicial disqualification, referred to as recusal, is the act of abstaining from participation in an official action such as a legal proceeding due to a conflict of interest of the presiding court official or administrative officer.

Grounds for Recusal:

1. The judge is biased in favour of one party, or against another, or that a reasonable objective observer would think he might be.
2. Interest in the subject matter, or relationship with someone who is interested in it.
3. Background or experience, such as the judge's prior work as a lawyer.
4. Personal knowledge about the parties or the facts of the case.
5. Ex parte communications with lawyers or non-lawyers.
6. Rulings, comments or conduct.

Are there any laws in this regard?

There are no definite rules on recusals by Judges.

- However, In taking oath of office, judges, both of the Supreme Court and of the high courts, promise to perform their duties, to deliver justice, "without fear or favour, affection or ill-will".

What has the Supreme Court said on this?

Justice J. Chelameswar in his opinion in **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015)** held "Where a judge has a pecuniary interest, no further inquiry as to whether there was a 'real danger' or 'reasonable suspicion' of bias is required to be undertaken".

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. FDI Inflows

Context: India has attracted highest ever total FDI inflow of U.S.\$81.72 billion during the financial year 2020-21 (10% above FY2019-20). RBI reported that equity component of inflows was over U.S.\$61.4 billion.

Positive

- Rising FDI inflows into India is at times where Global FDI inflows in 2020 had declined by 42% over the level in 2019, and inflows to developing countries had fallen by 12%

Concerns

- **Jio Deal:** Data shows that three Reliance Group companies together received U.S.\$27.8 billion or, 54.1% of the total equity inflows during the three quarters of FY2020-21.
- **Concentration in distribution:** Without the top five FDI deals, FDI inflows during 2020-21 would have declined by about a third of their level a year ago.
- **Lacks Creation of Productive assets:** The nature of the bulk of the “investments” involved a mere transfer of shares without creating productive assets in the country. Thus, FDI can’t contribute much to the revival of economy.
- **Inadequate Investment in Manufacturing sector:** This sector received just 17.4% of the total inflows during 2020-21 in contrast to Service sector attracting 80% of total inflows.

Conclusion

Going forward, the pipeline of FDI for 2021-22 could be supported by the thrust given to PLI and domestic growth prospects.

6. Inland Vessel Bill 2021

In news

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the Inland Vessels Bill, 2021.
 - It will replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917 after passing in Parliament.
- The Bill will regulate safety, security and registration of inland vessels.

Features of the Bill:

- Unified law for the entire country, instead of separate rules framed by the States.
- Central database for recording the details of vessel, vessel registration, crew on an electronic portal.
- All non-mechanically propelled vessels will also have to be enrolled at the district, taluk or panchayat or village level.
- It enlarges the definition of ‘inland waters’, by including tidal water limit and national waterways
- It also deals with pollution control measures of Inland Vessels.
- It directs the Central Government to designate a list of chemicals, substances, etc. as pollutants.

Inland Waterways

- India has about 14,500 km of navigable waterways which comprise of rivers, canals, backwaters, creeks, etc.
- As per the National Waterways Act 2016, 111 waterways have been declared as National Waterways (NWs).
- NW-1: Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River System (Prayagraj-Haldia) with length 1620 km is the longest National Waterway in India.

7. Children and Digital Dumpsites report:

Context:

The new report, titled **Children and Digital Dumpsites**, was recently released by the WHO.

Key findings:

- More than **18 million children** and adolescents working at e-waste dumpsites in low- and middle-income countries are potentially at the risk of severe health hazards.
- They face risk due to discarded **electronic devices or e-waste being dumped from high-income countries**.

What are the Concerns?

e-waste contains over 1,000 precious metals and other substances like gold, copper, mercury and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

1. The processing is done in low-income countries, which do not have proper safeguarding regulation and which makes the process even more dangerous.
2. Children are especially preferred at these dumpsites because of their small and dexterous hands.
3. Several women, including expectant mothers, also work there. Processing e-waste exposes them as well as their children to these toxins, which can lead to premature births and stillbirth.
4. The hazardous impact of working at such sites is also experienced by families and communities that reside in the vicinity of these e-waste dumpsites.

Volume of water generated across the world:

The volume of e-waste generated is surging rapidly across the globe. About 53.6 million tonnes of e-waste was generated in 2019.

- Only 17.4 per cent of this e-waste was processed in formal recycling facilities. The rest of it was dumped in low- or middle-income countries for illegal processing by informal workers.
- This is likely to increase in the coming years because of the rise in the number of smartphones and computers.

What actually constitutes e-waste?

E-Waste is short for **Electronic-Waste** and the term is used to describe old, end-of-life or discarded electronic appliances. It **includes their components, consumables, parts and spares.**

Management of e- waste in India:

Laws to manage e-waste have been in place in India since 2011, mandating that only authorised dismantlers and recyclers collect e-waste. **E-waste (Management) Rules, 2016** was enacted in 2017.

E-waste Generation in India:

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India generated more than 10 lakh tonnes of e-waste in 2019-20, an increase from 7 lakh tonnes in 2017-18. Against this, the e-waste dismantling capacity has not been increased from 7.82 lakh tonnes since 2017-18.

8. Helpline for Cyber Fraud launched

In news

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has operationalised the national Helpline 155260 and Reporting Platform for preventing financial loss due to cyber fraud.
 - Cyber Fraud is the crime committed via a computer with the intent to corrupt another individual's personal and financial information stored online.
- The National Helpline and Reporting Platform provides a mechanism for persons cheated in cyber frauds to report such cases to prevent loss of their hard earned money.

- Also, a National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 is being formulated by the Office of National Cyber Security Coordinator at the National Security Council Secretariat.

About the initiative

- The helpline has been made operational by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), in coordination with the Reserve Bank of India, all major banks, payment banks, wallets and online merchants.
- It has been developed by I4C to integrate Law Enforcement Agencies and Banks and Financial Intermediaries.
- The facility empowers both the banks and the police.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

- The scheme to set up I4C was approved in October 2018.
- It deals with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- It has seven components:
 - National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit
 - National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal
 - National Cyber Crime Training Centre
 - Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit
 - National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre
 - National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem
 - Platform for Joint Cyber Crime Investigation Team.
- **Location:** New Delhi.

Other Initiatives to Tackle Cybercrime:

- Draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018 to secure citizens data.
- Cyber Swachhta Kendra
- Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN)

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is in the state of

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Rajasthan
- c. Uttar Pradesh
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a protected area in Uttar Pradesh. It shares the north-eastern boundary with Nepal.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Jamdani weaving tradition is of Bengali origin.
2. Uppada Jamdani Silk Saree from Telangana has been accorded the GI tag.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Jamdani weaving tradition is of Bengali origin.
- Jamdani is a handloom woven fabric made of cotton, which was historically referred to as muslin.
- Uppada Jamdani Silk Saree that has been accorded GI tag is from Andhra Pradesh.

3. With reference to Committee of Privileges, which of the following statements is/are incorrect?

1. The functions of the committee are semi-judicial in nature.
2. In Lok Sabha it has 15 members, in Rajya Sabha, it has 10.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Some distinct rights are enjoyed by the legislators in a parliament or an assembly without which they cannot discharge their functions and these rights are peculiar to them and as such are not enjoyed by members of any other institution or body of individuals.
- In India, these privileges emanate from the Constitution itself with identical provisions in this regard in the form of Articles 105 and 194, which give these privileges to the Members of Parliament and members of the state legislature respectively.
- Committee of Privileges investigates the matters of breach of such privileges.
- Its function is to examine every question involving breach of privilege of the House or of the members of any Committee thereof referred to it by the House or by the Speaker.
- It has 15 Members in Lok Sabha and 10 Members in Rajya Sabha.
- It recommends suitable actions to be initiated by the house. Therefore, the functions of the committee are semi-judicial in nature.

4. Consider the following statements:

1. The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General is appointed by the Security Council.
2. The Secretary-General does not have the option of reappointment.

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

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- The United Nations General Assembly appointed Antonio Guterres as the ninth UN Secretary General (UNSG) for a second term beginning 1st January, 2022 and ending on 31st 2026.
 - He was the former Prime minister of Portugal.
- Under the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is **appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
 - **Each Secretary-General has the option of a second term** if they can garner enough support from Member states. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - Guterres was elected after a reformed selection process that included a public informal dialogue session in the General Assembly, involving civil society representatives, aimed at ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

5. With reference to 'Election Petition', consider the following statements:

1. Election petition is the only legal remedy submitted to Election Commission of India after the election is over.
2. Such a petition has to be filed within two months from the date of the poll results.

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 : D

Explanation

- The **Election Commission's role ends with the declaration of results**, 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. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- Such a petition has to be filed within **45 days from the date of the poll results**; nothing is entertained by courts after that. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

6. IN - EUNAVFOR is a Joint Naval Exercise being conducted between India and?

- a. Ecuador
- b. El Salvador
- c. European Union
- d. None of the above

Answer : c

- *For the first time, the **Indian Navy** is participating in joint drills, **IN - EUNAVFOR**, with the **European Union Naval Force**.*
- The exercise comprising warships from the French, Spanish and Italian navies, being held in the Gulf of Aden.
- EUNAVFOR and the Indian Navy converge on multiple issues including counter piracy operations and protection of vessels deployed under the charter of World Food Programme (UN WFP).
- The two also hold regular interactions through SHADE (Shared Awareness and De-confliction) meetings annually in Bahrain.
- 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.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Examine the concept of cooperative farming, in light of problem of land fragmentation, in promoting the socio-economic welfare of farmers. (250 words)

Approach

- Write in brief about the concept of cooperative farming.
- Just give current status and challenges of land fragmentation.
- Examine how cooperative farming can be beneficial and enumerate its challenges and the solutions.
- Emphasize on the future need of the land consolidation and cooperative farming.

2. How are integrated steel plants different from mini steel plants? What problems does the industry face? What recent developments have led to a rise in the production capacity? (250 words)

Approach

- Write what are the integrated and mini steel plants in the introduction part.
- Differentiate between the two.
- Enumerate the problems and recent developments taken to increase the productivity.

