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## GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

### 1. Towards a more federal structure

#### Background:

- Given the challenges to the unity of India at the time of independence, it was natural that **India opted to be a Union** unlike the U.S. and many other large countries which have federal governments.
  - **Article 1 in the Constitution states that India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.**
- Unlike a federal system that divides power between national and local forms of government, the **Indian model often referred to as quasi-federal has the Central government wielding more authority and power.** Hence the constitutional system of India though basically federal has some striking unitary features. One such aspect is observed in **the realm of fiscal federalism.**
  - Fiscal federalism deals with the financial relations between units of governments in a federal government system. Fiscal federalism deals with the division of governmental functions and financial relations among levels of government.

#### Fiscal federalism in India:

- Unlike in federal systems of the U.S. and Switzerland, where both the federal and state governments collect direct taxes, **in India, direct tax collection is the exclusive realm of the Central government.** States normally derive their income from indirect taxes, most commonly from sales tax. Besides this, State List revenue sources include land revenue, excise on alcoholic liquor, estate duty, tax on vehicles, etc.
- **State governments get funds from the Central government** according to the Finance Commission's recommendations.
  - As per the latest Finance Commission recommendations, the Central government is supposed to distribute **41% of its gross tax revenues to the State governments.**
  - The **horizontal revenue distribution** is based on parameters like population and poverty levels.
- A **"fragmented" transfer system** is a prime feature of the Indian fiscal federal arrangements between the union and the states. The transfer of financial

resources from the union to the states flow through various streams which fall in either of the following categories:

- General purpose transfers (i.e. states can spend these resources on their respective priorities which can be drawn up by them; or
- **Conditional transfers** (i.e. the centre only transfers resources upon the condition that the states must use it for particular programs and schemes drawn up by the centre)
- **A substantial proportion of the funds received by the states continue to be conditional transfers** which are largely linked to the Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
- **The cess levied by the Central government** on various items which adds up to over ₹5 lakh crore is not shared with the State governments.
- In recent years, the fiscal relations between the union and state governments have undergone significant changes. Most significant is the **introduction of the Goods and Services Tax** which have further decreased the revenue collections for the states.

### Concerns associated with lack of robust fiscal federalism: ★

#### Vertical Imbalances:

- The **fiscal asymmetry in powers of taxation vested with the different levels of government in relation to their expenditure responsibilities** prescribed by the Indian Constitution has led to vertical imbalances.
  - The central government is given a much greater domain of taxation, as against their expenditure responsibility.
  - At an all-India level, the States get 26% of their total revenue from the Central government.
- The vertical imbalances can have an **adverse impact on India's growth and development.**

#### Horizontal Imbalances:

- The horizontal devolution from the finance commissions, post-1990s, has essentially become a vehicle for **coercing states to implement fiscal reforms as part of economic liberalization.**
- This move has reduced the policy outreach of the government as they now solely rely on the finance commission, which in turn, leads to a serious **problem of increasing regional and sub-regional inequities.**
  - Some of the so-called poorer States get up to 50% of their total revenue from the Central government, making them even more dependent.
- It has caused an unfortunate **surge in horizontal imbalances** because of the differing levels of attainment by the states, resulting from the differential

growth rates and their developmental status in terms of the state of social or infrastructure capital.

- This may potentially **reduce the states' capacity to intervene in economic and social sectors.**

### **Politicizing of the fiscal devolution:**

- Though the financial devolution to states is based on criteria set by the Finance Commission, often politics intervenes and some States get less and some more. Also, usually, the Central government does not meet the set target for vertical devolution.
- The economic power available to the Central government under this system allows the ruling parties at the Centre to use these funds to their advantage.
- This leads to various States either petitioning or coming into conflict with the Central government on this issue.

### **Issue of regional disparity:**

- Maharashtra, Delhi and Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat contribute 72% of the total tax revenue; however, they receive a lesser share of the revenue distributed by the Central government.
- **This disparity is more evident when one compares the northern and southern states.** States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to receive a substantial proportion of the revenue distributed despite lower levels of revenue contribution.
- Given the fact that the population growth rates in the south have come down to near zero, whereas the population in central and north India still continues to grow, **the cross-subsidy from the south to the north** will therefore only grow in the times to come.
- The concerns associated with the disparity of financial devolution along with concerns of the shifting of political power to the more populous northern states post a possible 2026 delimitation exercise have raised apprehensions of political marginalization in the southern states. This **could fuel divisive politics in such states.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Given the many concerns associated with the current framework of fiscal federalism and the political challenges in addressing them, there is a serious need for redefining India's current fiscal federalism structure.
- In this direction, there is the need to provide **greater economic power to the States so that they can directly collect more taxes and be less dependent on the Central government.** The poorer States will need some support from the centre for a transition period.

- **Fiscal empowerment of the states** rather than the current top-down approach would bring the following benefits:
  - This would **improve Centre-State relations** given the reduced vertical imbalances.
  - This would not only help the states collect higher revenues, but could accrue critical **improvements in terms of efficiency, accountability, manageability and autonomy**. Allocation of resources can be done more effectively by states and local governments.
  - Such a step would **fiscally empower the states to undertake crucial developmental interventions**.
  - Other benefits of fiscal decentralization include: regional and local differences can be taken into account; lower planning and administrative costs; competition among local governments favours organizational and political innovations; and more efficient politics as citizens have more influence.

### Conclusion:

- **Fiscal federalism is an important aspect of political federalism** which needs to be recognized and nurtured to ensure the unity and integrity of the nation.

## **2. Centre moots ban on 'flash sales' on e-com sites**

### Context:

The government has proposed changes to the **Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules 2020**.

### Issue:

- The **rapid growth of e-commerce platforms** has brought into the purview the **unfair trade practices of the marketplace e-commerce entities**.
- Such platforms have been engaging in:
  - **manipulating search result** to promote certain sellers
  - **preferential treatment** to some sellers
  - **indirectly operating the sellers on their platform**
  - **impinging the free choice** of consumers
  - **selling goods close to expiration**

### Details:

- This proposal comes as a move to **monitor deep discounts offered on e-commerce websites.**
- The government has proposed **banning all flash sales.**
- The proposed amendments aim to **bring transparency in the e-commerce platforms and further strengthen the regulatory regime** to curb the prevalent unfair trade practices.

#### The proposed amendments:

- Appointment of **Chief Compliance Officer**, a **nodal contact person** for 24×7 coordination with law enforcement agencies, **officers to ensure compliance** to their orders and **Resident Grievance Officer** for redressing the grievances of consumers on the e-commerce platform.
- A framework for **registration of every e-commerce entity with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** will be put in place.
- **Mis-selling has been prohibited** i.e selling goods and services by deliberate misrepresentation of information.
- Where an e-commerce entity offers imported goods or services, a **filter must be incorporated to identify the country of origin and suggest alternatives of domestic goods.**
- Provisions of **fall-back liability** for every marketplace e-commerce entity have been provided, in case a **seller fails to deliver the goods or services due to negligent conduct.**

#### Note:

- However, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs said that the **conventional flash sale would not be banned**, but that only predatory ones would be banned.
- It said that certain e-commerce entities were engaging in limiting consumer choice by **indulging in 'back-to-back' or 'flash' sales wherein one seller on a platform does not carry any inventory or order fulfilment capability but merely places a 'flash or back-to-back' order with another seller controlled by the platform.**
  - This **prevents a level playing field** and ultimately **limits customer choice and increases prices.**

### **3. A case to decriminalise suicide**

#### Background:

#### **Suicides in India:**

- Suicide is an **emerging and serious public health issue in India.**
- The rate of suicides has been increasing in India over the years. According to the World Health Organization, **India has the highest suicide rate in the Southeast Asian region.**
- As per the National Crime Records Bureau, around 1,34,516 cases of suicide were reported in 2018 in India.
- Suicide has been the **most common cause of death in the age group of 15–29 years.**
  - Depression, chronic ill health, guilt, trauma, substance abuse, failure in exams, and loss of loved ones are some of the leading reasons for suicides in India.

### **Section 309:**

- In India, **suicide is illegal** and the survivor would face a jail term of up to one year and a fine under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code.

### **Arguments in favour of penal provisions of Section 309:**

- While the **right to life is a natural right embodied in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**, suicide amounts to an unnatural termination or extinction of life and, therefore, incompatible and inconsistent with the concept of the right to life.
- The judgment in Gian Kaur V. State of Punjab (1996) and the Supreme Court's Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011) judgment, has endorsed the above observation.

### **Arguments against penal provisions of Section 309:**

- The **Bombay High Court in the Maruti Shripati Dubal v. State of Maharashtra (1986) case declared Section 309 unconstitutional** based on the reasoning that the right to live will also include a right not to live or not to be forced to live.
- Similar views were expressed in the Chenna Jagadeeswar v. State of Andhra Pradesh and P. Rathinam v. Union of India (1994) cases. These judgments note **Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code as being violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.**
- The purpose of any punishment is to prevent a person from committing any crime. The **prescribed punishments under Section 309 seem ineffective in preventing prospective suicides by deterrence.**
- Rather than punishment, the person who made the suicide attempt on account of any possible mental disorders must be provided psychiatric and reformatory treatment and not subjected to imprisonment.

### Recommendations:

#### Repealing of Section 309:

- There is an urgent need to **shift from penalizing attempts to suicide to providing psychological or mental treatment and support to the persons affected**, given the presumption of severe stress in case of an attempt to die by suicide.
- Thus the article argues for the **repealing of Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code**.

#### Preventing suicides:

- Reducing social isolation and social disintegration
- **Treating mental disorders**
- Enabling easy access to psychological counselling
- Improving coping strategies of people who are at risk through the promotion of psychological motivational sessions and stress-reducing techniques like meditation and yoga.
- Reducing risk factors for suicide, such as poverty and social vulnerability.

### Additional information:

#### Mental Healthcare Act:

- The Indian Parliament passed the **Mental Healthcare Act in 2017**.
- Section 115 (1) of the Act provides, "Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code, any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code."

## 4. NHRC panel to probe violence in Bengal

### What's in News?

The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has set up a committee to investigate complaints of post-poll violence in West Bengal.

- The committee has been constituted by the NHRC Chairperson **in accordance with a Calcutta High Court order**.

### Mandate:



- The committee would examine all cases of post-poll violence for which complaints have already been received by the NHRC or which may be received.
- It would also look into the complaints to the West Bengal State Legal Services Authority.

## 5. 'Use electronic machines to weigh rations'

### What's in News?

An **amendment** in the **Food Security** (Assistance to State Government) Rules, 2015, has been notified by the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**.

- It aims to **ensure the right quantity to beneficiaries in the distribution of subsidised foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** as per their entitlement.
- The Centre wants States to start **linking the electronic Point of Sale devices (ePoS) used at ration shops to electronic weighing machines**.
- States who are operating their ePoS devices judiciously and are able to **generate savings from the additional margin** can utilise the savings for purchase, operations and maintenance of electronic weighing scales and their integration with the point-of-sale devices.

### Importance:

- Integration of ePoS devices with electronic weighing scales would **ensure that the beneficiary is given the right quantity of foodgrains by the Fair Price Shop dealer as per his entitlement**.

## 6. The state of India's poor must be acknowledged

### Poverty line:

- The **Suresh Tendulkar Committee** report proposed a poverty line of Rs. 816 per capita per month for rural India and Rs. 1,000 per capita per month for urban India and based on this poverty line estimated the **poor constituting 7% of the Indian population**.

- The Rangarajan Committee estimated the **number of poor in India to be 29.6%**, based on persons spending below Rs. 47 a day in cities and Rs. 32 in villages.
- The World Bank proposes **\$2-a-day for the poverty line**.

### Poverty levels in India:

- In 2019, the **global Multidimensional Poverty Index reported that India lifted 271 million citizens out of poverty between 2006 and 2016**. However, since then multiple surveys point towards a fall in this trend.

### Impact of the pandemic on poverty levels:

- The Pew Research Center with the World Bank data estimated that the **number of poor in India has more than doubled to 134 million from 60 million due to the pandemic-induced recession**.
- In 2020, India alone contributed 57.3% of the growth of the global poor.

### Concerns:

- The deepening of poverty will have an **adverse impact on the nutritional security and health of the people** which along with limited avenues for access to quality education will only perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty.
- **The continuing low per capita income and widening economic inequality do not augur well for India's growth and development.**

## **GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**

### **7. SC seeks govt. decision on ex gratia payment**

#### Context:

The Supreme Court has sought the **government's decision on payment of ex gratia** to families of people that lost their lives to COVID-19.

#### Background:

- Recently, the Union government had responded by stating that its current focus was on **utilising funds for food, medical care, oxygen, vaccination and**

**pumping up the economy** rather than pay a **one-time compensation of ₹4 lakh** each to families of people who died of COVID-19.

- SC says **framing of a uniform compensation scheme** could be considered.
- However, the government argues that instead of one-time relief, it has gone for a **multi-pronged approach** as **COVID-19 is not a one-time disaster**.

### Details:

- The petitioners have highlighted a 2015 notification, requiring the **government to pay ex gratia of 4 lakh each to victims' families** under **Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act**.

### **Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act.**

The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** shall recommend guidelines for the **minimum standards of relief** to be provided to persons affected by disaster, which shall include:

- the **minimum requirements to be provided in the relief camps** in relation to shelter, food, drinking water, medical cover and sanitation;
- the **special provisions** to be made for **widows and orphans**;
- **ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life** as also **assistance on account of damage to houses** and for **restoration of means of livelihood**;
- such **other relief as may be necessary**.

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS

### GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

#### 1. What govt proposes to change in film certification

The Centre has recently released the draft Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021 to the general public for comments.

##### Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021

- The new draft proposes to amend the Cinematograph Act of 1952 with some provisions.
- It seeks to give the Centre “revisionary powers” and enable it to “re-examine” films already cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

A look at what the draft proposes to change:

##### (a) Revision of certification

- This will equip the Centre with revisionary powers on account of violation of Section 5B(1) (principles for guidance in certifying films).
- The current Act, in Section 6, already equips the Centre to call for records of proceedings in relation to a film’s certification.
- The Ministry of I&B explained that the proposed revision “means that the Central Government, if the situation so warranted, has the power to reverse the decision of the Board”.
- Currently, because of a judgment by the Karnataka High Court, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in November 2020, the Centre cannot use its revisionary powers on films that have already been granted a certificate by the CBFC.

##### Issues

- The draft comes shortly after the abolition of the Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal, which was the last point of appeal for filmmakers against the certificate granted to their film.
- The draft has been criticized by filmmakers and term it a “super censor”.

### (b) Age-based certification

- The draft proposes to introduce age-based categorisation and classification. Currently, films are certified into three categories – ‘U’ for unrestricted public exhibition; ‘U/A’ that requires parental guidance for children under 12; and ‘A’ for adult films.
- The new draft proposes to divide the categories into further age-based groups: U/A 7+, U/A 13+ and U/A 16+.
- This proposed age classification for films echoes the new IT rules for streaming platforms.

### (c) Provision against piracy

- The Ministry noted that at present, there are no enabling provisions to check film piracy in the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- The draft proposes to add Section 6AA that will prohibit unauthorized recording.
- The proposed section states, no person shall, without the written authorization of the author, be permitted to make an audio-visual recording device.
- Violation shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than three months and may extend to three years and with a fine which shall not be less than Rs 3 lakh which may extend to 5 per cent of the audited gross production cost or with both.

### (d) Eternal certificate

- The draft proposes to certify films for perpetuity.
- Currently, a certificate issued by the CBFC is valid only for 10 years.

## 2. Antibodies against Nipah Virus in Bats

### Why in News

A recent survey has found the **presence of antibodies** against the **Nipah virus (NiV)** in some **bat species** from a cave in **Mahabaleshwar**, a popular hill station in **Maharashtra**.

- The survey was conducted by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - National Institute of Virology (NIV)**.

## Key Points

- **About the Survey:**
  - The NIV team looked at **Rousettus leschenaultii and Pipistrellus pipistrellus bats** that are common in India.
    - **Pteropus medius bats**, which are large **fruit-eating bats**, are the **reservoir for NiV in India** as both **NiV RNA** and antibodies were detected in the samples of these bats collected during previous NiV outbreaks.
  - A **bat's immune system** is especially **adept** at withstanding **viral infection** because of its **ability to limit excessive inflammation** – which uniquely allows viruses to thrive without proving deadly to the mammal.
- **Nipah virus (NiV):**
  - **About:**
    - It is a **zoonotic virus** (it is transmitted from animals to humans).
    - The **organism which causes Nipah Virus encephalitis is an RNA or Ribonucleic acid virus of the family Paramyxoviridae, genus Henipavirus**, and is **closely related to Hendra virus**.
      - Hendra virus (HeV) infection is a **rare emerging zoonosis** that causes severe and often fatal disease in both **infected horses and humans**.
    - It **first broke out in Malaysia and Singapore in 1998 and 1999**.
    - It **first appeared in domestic pigs** and has been found among several species of domestic animals including dogs, cats, goats, horses and sheep.
  - **Transmission:**
    - The disease **spreads through fruit bats or 'flying foxes,' of the genus Pteropus**, who are natural reservoir hosts of the Nipah and Hendra viruses.
    - The virus is present in bat urine and potentially, bat faeces, saliva, and birthing fluids.
  - **Symptoms:**
    - The human infection presents as an **encephalitic syndrome** marked by fever, headache, drowsiness, disorientation, mental confusion, coma, and potentially death.
  - **Prevention:**
    - Currently, there are **no vaccines** for both humans and animals. Intensive supportive care is given to humans infected by Nipah virus.

### 3. Delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir

## Why in News

Recently, the delimitation exercise has started in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

- The completion of the delimitation exercise will **mark the political process in the Union Territory (UT)** that has been **under Centre's rule since June 2018**.

## Key Points

- **Delimitation:**
  - Delimitation is the **act of fixing or redrawing the limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies** (Assembly or Lok Sabha seat) in a country or a province having a legislative body, as per the **Election Commission**.
  - The delimitation exercise is **carried out by an independent high-powered panel known as the Delimitation Commission** whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned by any court.
  - The exercise has been carried out over the years **to redefine the area of a constituency-based on its population size (based on the last Census)**.
  - Aside from changing the limits of a constituency, the process **may result in change in the number of seats in a state**.
  - This exercise also **involves reservation of Assembly seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** in accordance with the Constitution.
- **Aim:**
  - The key aim is **to have equal representation to equal segments of the population** in order to ensure a fair division of geographical areas so that all political parties or candidates contesting elections have a level playing field in terms of a number of voters.
- **Constitutional Basis for Delimitation:**
  - Under **Article 82**, the Parliament enacts a **Delimitation Act** after every Census.
  - Under **Article 170**, States also get divided **into territorial constituencies** as per Delimitation Act after every Census.
  - Once the **Act is in force**, the Union government sets up a **Delimitation Commission**.
  - However, the **first delimitation exercise was carried out by the President (with the help of the Election Commission) in 1950-51**.
    - The **Delimitation Commission Act** was enacted in 1952.
  - Delimitation Commissions **have been set up four times** – 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002 under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.
    - There was **no delimitation after the 1981 and 1991 Censuses**.

- **Delimitation Commission:**
  - The Delimitation Commission is **appointed by the President of India** and **works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India.**
  - **Composition:**
    - Retired Supreme Court judge
    - Chief Election Commissioner
    - Respective State Election Commissioners.
- **Delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir:**
  - The delimitation exercise in J&K in the past **has been slightly different** from those in the rest of the country because of the **region's special status.**
  - The **delimitation of Lok Sabha seats** was then governed by the **Indian Constitution** in J&K, but the **delimitation of Assembly seats** was governed separately by the **Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.**
  - However, Jammu and Kashmir lost its special status and was **divided into two Union Territories (J&K and Ladakh)** after the **abrogation of its special status under Article 370, on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2019.**
  - Following this, a **special delimitation commission** was constituted on **6<sup>th</sup> March, 2020** to carve out Assembly and Parliament seats in the UT.
- **Issues with Delimitation:**
  - **States that take little interest in population control could end up with a greater number of seats** in Parliament. The southern states that promoted family planning faced the possibility of having their seats reduced.
  - In 2002-08, Delimitation was done based on the 2001 census, but the total number of seats in the Assemblies and Parliament decided as per the 1971 Census was not changed.
  - The Constitution has also **capped the number of Lok Shaba & Rajya Sabha seats to a maximum of 550 & 250 respectively** and increasing populations are being represented by a single representative.

## **GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**



#### 4. Corporates need commitment to sustainability and community alongside pursuit of profit

##### Capitalism in the aftermath of Covid-19

- The 2008 crisis was caused by the excesses of global finance, whereas the 2020 economic crisis was caused by a pandemic that spilled over to the economy.
- While the current pandemic is the first of its kind in nine decades, the dire economic consequences are very similar to that global financial crisis just a decade ago.
- What is also similar is the policy response that has followed both the 2008 and 2020 crises – the Keynesian prescription of the government stimulating a **depressed economy by using monetary and fiscal instruments**.
- Cheap liquidity preserves the wealth of the asset-owning classes even as the real economy stalls.
- However, over-stretched governments head towards a **debt/fiscal crisis** which eventually forces austerity, **hitting those dependent on government handouts**.
- It is this **inequality in outcomes** that is unlikely to happen this time.
- Already, the G-7 has pledged to maintain a **minimum level of corporation tax**.
- There have also been calls for additional taxation, particularly on the assets of the wealthy.

##### What corporates can do

- Instead of waiting for governments to react under popular pressure, corporates must themselves set out on a different path.
- Covid-19 has brought home the fragility of human life and the deeply interconnected fate of humanity.
- Outside of the pandemic, there is no better example of this than climate change which, if left uncontrolled, could devastate the world.
- While governments negotiate, corporates must respond with voluntary **commitments to mitigate climate change**.
- Climate change mitigation should be at the core of all business models going forward.
- In addition, promoters need to come forward to pledge more of their wealth towards philanthropy.
- India implemented the concept of **corporate social responsibility** as part of its legal framework a decade ago.

## Investor pressure for action towards environment

- The ability of the private sector to work for the greater good seems implausible.
- But it is already happening – not because of government regulation, but because of investor pressure.
- Progressive actions towards the environment and society are being **rewarded by investors**.
- The absence of such progressive actions is being penalised.
- Market forces are, after all, **embedded in society**.
- They are perfectly capable of moving beyond profit.

## Threat of new-age tech capitalism

- The real challenge for society, government and capitalists comes from the **new-age tech capitalists**.
- They are the new monopolists or oligopolists who don't exercise their power over society by charging a supernormal price.
- In fact, a lot of them provide goods and services at hefty discounts.
- Instead, what they seek is to control information and influence choices.
- Many of the promoters of such enterprises are philanthropists but society and governments have **a different set of concerns on how they exercise power**.

## Conclusion

An imperfect world is passing through a perfect storm. There will be big changes on the other side. Capitalism will survive. It could thrive by choosing its own pathway or it could stumble along under the hammer of big government fuelled by populist backlash.

## 5. Integrated Power Development Scheme

### Why in News

A 50 kWp Solar rooftop in Solan, Himachal Pradesh was inaugurated under **Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)** of the Ministry of Power.

- The project **further reinforces the 'Go Green' Initiative** of the government envisaged in the Urban Distribution scheme.

## Key Points

- **About IPDS:**
  - **Launch:**
    - December 2014.
  - **Nodal Agency:**
    - **Power Finance Corporation Ltd. (PFC)**, a Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power.
  - **Components:**
    - Strengthening of **sub-transmission and distribution networks** in the urban areas.
    - **Metering of distribution transformers / feeders / consumers** in the urban areas.
    - Schemes for **Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and IT enablement** of the distribution sector.
      - ERP helps in integrating the important parts of a business.
    - **Underground cabling** to include additional demand of States and **smart metering** solution for performing **UDAY States and Solar panels on Govt. buildings** with net-metering are also permissible under the scheme.
  - **Objectives**
    - 24×7 Power supplies for consumers.
    - Reduction of AT&C (aggregate technical and commercial) losses.
    - Providing access to power to all households.
  - **Eligibility:**
    - All Power Distribution Companies (Discoms) are eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.
  - **Funding Pattern:**
    - **GoI (Government of India) Grant:** 60% (85% for special category States).
    - **Additional Grant:** 15% (5% for special category States) - linked to achievement of milestones.
- **Power Sector in India:**
  - India's power sector is **one of the most diversified** in the world. Sources of power generation range from **conventional sources** such as **coal, lignite, natural gas, oil, hydro and nuclear power** to viable **non-conventional sources** such as **wind, solar, and agricultural and domestic waste**.
  - India is the **third-largest producer** and **second-largest consumer** of electricity in the world.
  - **Electricity is a concurrent subject** (Seventh Schedule of the Constitution).

- The **Ministry of Power** is primarily responsible for the development of electrical energy in the country.
  - It administers the **Electricity Act, 2003** and the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.
- The Government has released its roadmap to achieve 175 GW capacity in renewable energy by 2022, which includes 100 GW of solar power and 60 GW of wind power.
  - The Government is preparing a 'rent a roof' policy for supporting its target of generating 40 gigawatts (GW) of power through solar rooftop projects by 2022.
  - The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** is the nodal Ministry for all matters relating to new and renewable energy.
- **100% FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)** is permitted under automatic route in the power sector.
- **Related Government Initiatives:**
  - **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya):** To ensure electrification of all willing households in the country in rural as well as urban areas.
  - **Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY):** The rural electrification scheme provides for (a) **separation of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders**; (b) strengthening and augmentation of sub-transmission and distribution **infrastructure in rural areas** including metering at distribution transformers, feeders and consumers end.
  - **GARV (Grameen Vidyutikaran) App:** To monitor transparency in **implementation of the electrification schemes**, Grameen Vidyut Abhiyanta (GVAs) have been appointed by the government to report progress through the GARV app.
  - **Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY):** For operational and financial turnaround of Discoms.
  - **'4 Es' in the Revised Tariff Policy:** The 4Es include **Electricity** for all, **Efficiency** to ensure affordable tariffs, **Environment** for a sustainable future, **Ease of doing business** to attract investments and ensure financial viability.
- **Achievements:**
  - **Solar tariffs in India have reduced** from Rs. 7.36/kWh in FY15 to Rs. 2.63/kWh in FY20.
  - As of December 2020, over 36.69 crore LED bulbs, 1.14 crore LED tube lights and 23 lakh **energy-efficient fans** have been distributed across the country, saving 47.65 billion kWh per year.
  - In the first half of November 2020, India's power consumption increased 7.8% to 50.15 billion units (BU), indicating **an improvement in economic activity**.

- Energy generation from thermal sources stood at 472.90 billion units (BU) in April-September 2020.
- India's rank jumped to 22 in 2019 from 137 in 2014 on World Bank's Ease of doing business - "Getting Electricity" ranking.
- As of 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2018, 100% village electrification was achieved under DDUGJY.

## 6. Retreating Monsoon is a global phenomenon: Study

Rainfall during retreating monsoon, which parts of South India experience every year, is not a local anomaly and is global in nature and scale, according to a recent study by the University of Sydney.

### What is Retreating Monsoon?

- In India, retreating monsoon is the withdrawal of south-west monsoon winds from North India.
- The withdrawal is gradual and takes about three months.
- With the retreat of the monsoons, the clouds disappear and the sky becomes clear. The day temperature starts falling steeply.
- Monsoon rains weaken all over India except few southeastern states.
- It is helpful in Rabi crop cultivation.

### What has the research found?

- The research has identified regions in the northern hemisphere that receive the bulk of the rainfall during September, October and November and southern hemisphere that receive most of the rainfall from March to August.
- The discovery that these are part of a global pattern and not one-off occurrences means they can be systematically studied, which will help understand how these communities could be affected by climate change.
- Peninsular India and parts of South-East Asia are among the eight regions examined in the study.

### Factors affecting the retreat

- The eight global regions identified by the study that receive most of their rainfall after summer, have several things in common.
- They lie on the eastern fringes of landmasses and are in close proximity to mountain ranges with modest heights.

Two predominant factors cause the phenomenon:

- First, the low mountain range in each region runs from north to south, shielding it from west-bound winds that trigger summer monsoon.
- After summer, the range aids in the 'orographic lift' or rising of east-bound air mass from a lower to higher elevation, forming clouds and resulting in rain.
- The second factor is atmospheric convection or vertical movement of air.
- As the earth is heated by the sun, different surfaces absorb different amounts of energy and convection may occur where the surface heats up very rapidly.
- As the surface warms, it heats the overlying air, which gradually becomes less dense than the surrounding air and begins to rise.
- This condition is more favorable from September to February because of the role played by sea surface temperature or water temperature.

## **7. Amendments to the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020**

For the purposes of preventing unfair trade practices in e-commerce, the Central Government had notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 with effect from 23 July 2020.

### **Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020**

The proposed amendments aim to bring transparency in the e-commerce platforms and further strengthen the regulatory regime to curb the prevalent unfair trade practices.

The proposed amendments are as follows:

#### **(a) Chief Compliance Officer**

- To ensure compliance of the rules, the appointment of Chief Compliance Officer, a nodal contact person for 24×7 coordination with law enforcement agencies, officers to ensure compliance to their orders and Resident Grievance Officer for redressing of the grievances of the consumers on the e-commerce platform, has been proposed.
- This would ensure effective compliance with the provisions of the Act and Rules and also strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism on e-commerce entities.

**(b) Registration of e-coms**

- Putting in place a framework for registration of every e-commerce entity with the DPIIT for allotment of a registration number which shall be displayed prominently on the website as well as invoice of every order placed by the e-commerce entity.
- This would help create a database of genuine e-commerce entities and ensure that the consumers are able to verify the genuineness of an e-commerce entity before transacting through their platform.

**(c) Prohibition of miss-selling**

- The goods and services entities selling goods or services by deliberate misrepresentation of information have been prohibited.

**(d) Expiry dates**

- This would ensure that consumers are aware of the expiry date of the products they are buying on the e-commerce platform.
- It compels all sellers on marketplace e-commerce entities and all inventory e-commerce entities to provide the best before or use before the date to enable consumers to make an informed purchase decision.

**(e) Fair and equal treatment**

- It has been provided that where an e-commerce entity offers imported goods or services, it shall incorporate a filter mechanism to identify goods based on country of origin and suggest alternatives to ensure fair opportunity to domestic goods.

**(f) Fall-back liability**

- This would ensure that consumers are not adversely affected in the event where a seller fails to deliver the goods or services due to negligent conduct by such seller in fulfilling the duties and liabilities.

**Why need such an amendment?**

It was observed that there was an evident lack of regulatory oversight in e-commerce which required some urgent action.

- **Manipulating search results:** Moreover, the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms has also brought into the purview the unfair trade practices of the

marketplace e-commerce entities engaging in manipulating search result to promote certain sellers.

- **Preferential treatment:** This includes preferential treatment to some sellers, indirectly operating the sellers on their platform, impinging the free choice of consumers, selling goods close to expiration etc.
- **Flash sales:** Certain e-commerce entities are engaging in limiting consumer choice by indulging in “back to back” or “flash” sales. This prevents a level playing field and ultimately limits customer choice and increases prices.

### Prelims practice Questions

#### 1. Consider the following statements:

1. Madhuban Gajar is a biofortified carrot variety containing higher iron content.
2. CR DHAN 315 is a biofortified variety of rice having excess zinc content.

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

- **Biofortification** is the process by which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through agronomic practices, conventional plant breeding, or modern biotechnology.
- Recently, the Prime Minister dedicated 17 biofortified varieties of 8 crops to the nation. Some examples:
  - **Rice- CR DHAN 315 has excess zinc. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
  - Wheat- HI 1633 rich in protein, iron and zinc.
  - Maize- Hybrid varieties 1, 2 and 3 are enriched with lysine and tryptophan.
  - **Madhuban Gajar, a biofortified carrot variety, is benefitting more than 150 local farmers in Junagadh, Gujarat. It has higher  $\beta$ -carotene and iron content. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**



**2. Consider the following statements regarding 'Black Softshell Turtle':**

1. It is classified as Endangered in the IUCN Red List.
2. It is found in River Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

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

- **Black Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonina nigricans*)** looks almost the same as the Indian peacock softshell turtle (*Nilssonina hurum*), which is classified as Endangered in the IUCN Red List.
- **Habitat:** A freshwater species and there are 29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises found in India.
- They are found in ponds of temples in northeastern India and Bangladesh. Its distribution range also includes the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.  
**Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- Protection Status:
  - **IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered**
  - CITES: Appendix I
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: No legal protection
  - **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**

**3. Arrange the types of coal on the basis of carbon content from the highest to the lowest rank:**

1. Peat
2. Bituminous
3. Anthracite
4. Lignite

**Options:**

- a. 1-2-3-4
- b. 2-3-1-4
- c. 3-2-4-1
- d. 4-3-2-1

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- The ranking of the types of coal depends on the types and amounts of carbon the coal contains and on the amount of heat energy the coal can produce.
- Anthracite is the most mature coal and thus has the highest carbon content of any type of coal.
- Lignite coal (brown coal) is the lowest grade coal with the least concentration of carbon.
- Peat is a soft, organic material consisting of partly decayed plant and mineral matter. When peat is placed under high pressure and heat, it undergoes physical and chemical changes to become coal.
- Highest to lowest ranking: Anthracite, Bituminous, Lignite, Peat (least concentration of carbon).

**4. Consider the following statements with respect to Green Hydrogen:**

1. This is produced from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage technologies and is less polluting.
2. Green hydrogen can be used in industry and can be stored in existing gas pipelines to power household appliances.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called green hydrogen.
- Green hydrogen can be used in industry and can be stored in existing gas pipelines to power household appliances.
- Blue Hydrogen is produced from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage technologies and is less polluting.

**5. With reference to 'Sickle Cell Disease', consider the following statements:**

1. It is an inherited blood disease.
2. It affects hemoglobin that delivers oxygen to cells throughout the body.
3. It is not considered a disability and thus, not given disability certificates.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- A 1 and 3 only
- B 2 and 3 only
- C 1 and 2 only
- D 1, 2 and 3

Answer:C

**Explanation**

- Sickle Cell Disease is an **inherited blood disease** which is most common among people of African, Arabian and Indian origin. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is a group of disorders that **affects hemoglobin**, the molecule in red blood cells that **delivers oxygen to cells throughout the body**. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 has recognised persons with **blood disorders** (Thalassemia, Hemophilia and **Sickle Cell Disease**) as '**persons with disabilities**' under the Act.
  - Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and empowerment has increased the validity of disability certificates for SCD patients from 1 year to 3 year. **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

**6. What is/are common to the two historical places known as Ajanta and Mahabalipuram?**

1. Both were built in the same period.
2. Both belong to the same religious denomination.
3. Both have rock-cut monuments.

**Select the correct answer using the code given below.**

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. None of the statements given above is correct

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Ajanta rock-cut cave monuments were built during 200 BC-650 AD by the Vakataka kings. These are Buddhist monuments.
- Mahabalipuram was built between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Pallavas. It is a Hindu group of monuments.
- Both have rock-cut monuments.

**Mains Practice Questions**

1. Domestic abuse is one among many other social challenges posed by the conditions created by the pandemic. Discuss

**Approach:**

- Define the term violence against women with an emphasis on domestic abuse.
- Establish the link between the recent surge in domestic violence cases and COVID-19.
- Briefly explain the causes behind domestic violence and challenges associated.
- Discuss various steps need to be taken.
- Conclude suitably.

2. "Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity." Analyse this statement in light of India's pharmaceutical capabilities and responsibilities amid the novel coronavirus pandemic across the world.

**Approach:**

- Discuss India's position in the global pharmaceuticals sector.
- Mention the issues involved like rising demand for medicines, the moral obligation of India and challenges.
- Mention India's response to the global crisis.
- Conclude the answer with advantages associated.

