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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Overdue review

Context:

Chief Justice of India NV Ramana has questioned the **relevance of the controversial sedition law**. He has asked the Attorney General to examine the petition for **striking down Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code which criminalises the offence of sedition**.

Background:

- The Supreme Court in its **1962 judgment in the Kedar Nath case had upheld the constitutional validity of Section 124A**.
- The court had reasoned that without Section 124A, the state would be in jeopardy if the government was subverted. It also placed certain restrictions on its usage by emphasizing that Section 124A would apply only to expressions that either intended to or had the tendency to cause violence.

Details:

Petitioner's claims:

- The major argument of the petitioner for a relook of Section 124A is the fact that the Kedar Nath Singh judgement being almost 60 years old fails to accommodate more recent doctrines such as **'chilling effect' on free speech** in its analysis on the impact of sedition provisions.
 - The doctrine of 'chilling effect' on speech considers the probability of a legal provision causing psychological barriers in the free exercise of the right to speech and expression.
- The petitioner also claims that Section 124A criminalized expressions based on **vague terms such as 'disaffection towards government' and 'contempt towards government'**. The lack of a clear definition makes it **liable for misuse by the administration**.

2. Centre notifies purview of Krishna, Godavari Boards

Context:

The Centre has notified the **purview of Krishna and Godavari River Management Boards** (KRMB and GRMB) transferring the operation of all projects, including hydel generation, in the two river basins in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to the boards.

Details:

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) issued the gazette notification bringing **35 projects and their components in the Krishna Basin and Godavari Basin** in the two States under the boards' purview.

Significance:

- The notification assumes significance in the backdrop of the **escalation in the dispute** between the two States over project works and hydel generation at **Srisailem, Nagarjunasagar and Pulichintala reservoirs**.
- It gives the river management boards more teeth to **administer, regulate, operate and maintain projects**.
- This empowers the boards to **supervise the operation of headworks** of barrages, dams, reservoirs, regulating structures, water transmission lines and powerhouses at the projects.
- This move is expected to bring about the much-needed **neutrality on water resources matters between the two states**.

Note:

- KRMB and GRMB were constituted under the provision of the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**.
- The River Boards Act provides for the **establishment of river boards by the Central government** for the regulation and development of inter-state river and river valleys.

Inter-State River Water Disputes:

- **Article 262 of the Constitution** provides for the adjudication of **inter-state water disputes**.
- Under this, Parliament may by law provide for the **adjudication of any dispute or complaint** with respect to the **use, distribution and control of waters** of any inter-state river and river valley.
- Parliament may also provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court is to exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint.

3. An irrational draft population control Bill that must go

Context:

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister launched the State's population policy for 2021-2030.

Background:

- Given that the **increasing population acts as a hurdle in national development**, there have been calls to control the population growth rate.
- **India has been moving steadily towards attaining the replacement level of Total Fertility Rate of 2.1.** However, some states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to have high TFR.
 - UP has a TFR of 2.7, while Bihar has a TFR of 3.1.

Significance:

- The various aims set out in the new policy like **increasing the rate of modern contraceptive prevalence, male contraception, decreasing maternal mortality and infant mortality rates** are welcome.
- These objectives are in line with the **Cairo Consensus adopted in the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development in 1994.** The Cairo Consensus called for the promotion of reproductive rights, **empowering women**, universal education, maternal and infant health to tackle the challenge of high fertility.

Concerns:

Against right of a person to informed choices:

- **Incentives and penalties** form an integral component of the measures announced under UP's population policy, to control population growth.
 - The Government aims to incentivise one-child families and reward those with two children with perks in government schemes, rebates in taxes and loans, cash awards, etc. It aims to disincentivize more than two children through denial of subsidies and welfare benefits, a bar on applying for government jobs and taking part in local elections for those with more than two children.
- The incentives/disincentives approach has been **denounced in the past by the National Human Rights Commission** for being against the right of people to informed choices on the size of the family.

Failure to acknowledge underlying socio-economic aspects:

- This amounts to attempts of tackling a **basically socio-economic issue** as a demographic one. This is bound to remain ineffective as the policy fails to adequately account for the socio-economic aspects which have contributed to the higher TFR.

Threat of discrimination:

- Empirical studies of coercive measures have shown their discrimination against marginalised people in particular.
- The **disincentives approach could rob the access to critical governmental aid and support for the marginalized sections** and could further deepen the existing inequalities in the society.

Recommendations:

- Given the fact that the incentives/disincentives approach has had no discernible effect on population control, **States should tackle the socio-economic issues confronting India's citizenry.**
- This could involve implementing more substantive **poverty reduction schemes**, economic reforms aimed at raising labour productivity and employment opportunities, **empowering women, etc.**

4. India needs a renewed health-care system

Context:

Following the recent cabinet shuffle, India has got a new Union Health Minister.

The article talks about the **need for rebuilding trust in public health** through a **renewed healthcare system** in the country that lays its focus on the core **lessons learnt from the pandemic** as well as **ensures widespread positive impacts extending much beyond the COVID-19 situation.**

The availability of functional public health systems is of utmost importance. This can be illustrated through a case study.

- Maharashtra and Kerala currently have the highest number of COVID-19 cases in India.
- Their **economic situation is similar** as their per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is similar.
- However, their COVID-19 **case fatality rates are hugely different** – 0.48% for Kerala and 2.04% for Maharashtra.

- The primary reason for such divergence is likely to be the huge differences in the **effectiveness of public health systems**.
- **Kerala has per capita two and a half times more government doctors**, and an **equally higher proportion of government hospital beds** when compared to Maharashtra.
- Besides, Kerala allocates per capita over one and half times higher funds on public health every year.
- Despite Maharashtra having a large private healthcare sector, its **weak public health system has proved to be a critical deficiency**.

Robust government healthcare services in Kerala have translated into:

- **More effective outreach**
- **Timely testing**
- **Early case detection and more rational treatment for COVID patients**

What should be the new focus?

Attention to National Health Mission:

- A programme that requires the immediate attention of the Health Minister is the **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
 - Since 2017-18, Union government allocations for the NHM have declined in real terms, resulting in inadequate support to States for core activities such as immunisation.
 - These systemic gaps affect the delivery of COVID-19 vaccination.

Doubling the Healthcare budget allocation:

- Furthermore, the **condition of the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) remains pathetic**.
 - Central allocation for the NUHM is ₹1,000 crore, which amounts to **less than ₹2 per month per urban Indian**.
- As per the Parliamentary Standing Committee recommendations, the Government must allocate ₹1.6-lakh crore for public health during the current year for reaching National Health Policy targets.
- **Doubling the present central health Budget** could enable major strengthening of health services in rural and urban areas across the country.

Private sector regulation:

- There is a need to **regulate rates and standards of care in the private sector**.
- Massive hospital bills have caused untold distress even among the middle class.

- COVID-19 care costs ₹1 lakh to ₹3 lakh per week in large private hospitals.
- Panic due to drug shortages was significantly linked with major overuse of medicine by unregulated private hospitals (Eg: Remdesivir).
- Learning from stark market failures during the COVID-19 pandemic, **comprehensive regulation of private health care** must be a critical agenda for the new Health Minister.

Implement Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act (CEA):

- The central government must on priority take necessary steps to promote the **implementation of the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act (CEA)**.
- CEA was **passed in 2010** and is presently applicable to 11 States across India.
- This Act is not effectively implemented due to a **major delay in notification of central minimum standards, and failure to develop the central framework for the regulation of rates**.

Stop further Privatisation of Healthcare:

- NITI Aayog has recently published the document, 'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector' **promoting further privatisation of health care**.
- With proposals for handing over public hospitals to private operators, public health services that were hitherto free of cost, would begin to be charged for.
- This can prove to be detrimental in the current situation considering that **India already has one of the most privatised health systems in the world**.
- The Health Minister must **assert his authority to stop further privatisation**, which might benefit healthcare corporates and be damaging for ordinary people.

Conclusion:

Neglect of public health systems can mean large-scale, avoidable losses of lives; hence, **public health services must be upgraded rapidly and massively as a topmost priority**. Building people's trust in public health systems is important as it would help in overcoming vaccination hesitancy while strengthening the **promotion of healthy behaviours necessary to deal with the pandemic**.

5. Russia slams U.S.'s 'hasty' Afghan pullout

What's in News?

Russia has blamed the hasty withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops for a rapid deterioration in Afghanistan's security.

Details:

- Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan have **capitalised on the last stages of the withdrawal** of foreign troops to launch offensives.
- They have captured a swath of districts and border crossings, and encircling provincial capitals.
- This indicates **huge uncertainty around the future of the political and military situation in Afghanistan.**
- Russia hosted Taliban representatives in Moscow recently, where the insurgent group claimed to have control over some 85% of Afghanistan.
- The world is concerned about the potential for **instability reaching neighbouring Central Asian countries.** Russia has warned of instability spreading to neighbouring countries.

6. 'No work on Mekedatu sans CWMA nod'

Context:

The Centre has given its assurance that Karnataka will not be allowed to carry out any construction on the Mekedatu dam project on the Cauvery river **until its Detailed Project Report (DPR) is approved by the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA).**

Background:

Mekedatu project:

- The Karnataka state government has proposed the Mekedatu dam project in the **Cauvery Basin.**
 - Originally proposed as a **hydropower project**, the revised Mekedatu dam project apart from **catering to the drinking water needs of the Bengaluru Metropolitan City and surrounding areas** will also **help regulate the flow to Tamil Nadu** on a monthly basis, as stipulated by the Tribunal and the Supreme Court.
 - The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, and the subsequent Supreme Court Judgement have made allocations of Cauvery waters to all the riparian States – Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, apart from the Union Territory of Puducherry. It has also stipulated “tentative monthly deliveries during a normal year” to be made available by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.
- Tamil Nadu has challenged this move by Karnataka in the Supreme Court and impressed upon the union government not to grant Centre’s clearance for the project.

- Tamil Nadu's argument is that the building of the proposed project as close as 4 kms to the border will **allow the Karnataka state to impound and divert flows from "uncontrolled catchments" to itself** and this it claims goes against the order of the water disputes tribunal verdict which had already considered this component of uncontrolled flows by making allocation of the river waters.

Recommendations:

- The Cauvery river water sharing has become an emotive and political issue over the years and any future interventions must be guided by pragmatism.
 - A possible solution to this new development would be to get **both states to agree to the idea of a joint execution, operation and maintenance of the project** or through a third party's participation.
 - The project if it is agreed to must be implemented after **addressing relevant environmental concerns**.

7. China starts long-awaited carbon trading scheme

What's in News?

China has introduced the **emissions trading system**.

- The much-awaited scheme would act as a key tool in its quest to **drive down climate change-causing greenhouse gases and go carbon neutral by 2060**.
- China has hailed it as the foundation for what would become the **world's biggest carbon trading market**, forcing thousands of Chinese companies to **cut their pollution or face deep economic hits**.
- The scheme will set pollution caps for big-power businesses for the first time, and allows firms to buy the right to pollute from others with a lower carbon footprint.

Note:

- China is the **world's biggest carbon emitter** and seeking to take a global leadership role in the climate crisis.
- **China's coal, cement and steel production have all gone up** as the government pours in billions of dollars to energy-intensive sectors to **boost growth after the pandemic**.
- However, analysts say it is not a quick climate fix and **could take years before China changes course**.

8. Bail orders will be sent instantly to jail authorities: SC

Context:

The Chief Justice of India has announced **FASTER** scheme to cut delays in release from jail.

Background:

- In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court has made concerted moves to **decongest prisons**.
- The court turned a humanitarian eye to the over four lakh prison population trapped inside overcrowded jails as a surging second wave led to huge loss of lives.
- Earlier, a Bench led by Chief Justice Ramana had ordered the police to **limit arrests during the pandemic** to prevent overcrowding in jails.
- The bench also urged courts to **not order detention in a mechanical manner** in cases involving the punishment of less or up to seven years' imprisonment.
- It had ordered High-Powered Committees constituted in most States and Union Territories to **screen prisoners and release them on interim bail**.
- The court had also taken into consideration the plight of prisoners too scared to return home, though eligible for release on interim bail or parole.
 - In such cases, the court ordered proper medical facilities, immediate treatment and regular tests for both inmates and jail staff.

FASTER Scheme:

- The new scheme is called '**FASTER**' or '**Fast and Secure Transmission of Electronic Records**'.
- Through this, the Supreme Court would instantly, directly, securely and **electronically transmit bail and other orders** to jail authorities, district courts and High Courts.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

9. 'Be aware of underwater domain'

What's in News?

Chief of the Naval Staff has highlighted that for India, with regard to naval operations, **underwater domain awareness (UDA)** was one of the most critical areas.

Underwater domain awareness:

- Underwater domain awareness (UDA) is the **aspect of maritime domain awareness**.
- It focusses on the underwater sector, including, from a security perspective, **sea lines of communication (SLOC), coastal waters and varied maritime assets** with reference to hostile intent and the proliferation of submarine and mine capabilities intended to limit access to the seas and littoral waters.
- It is a concept that addresses the aspect of a nation's ability to **monitor all the developments** in the underwater region and **possibly prevent events**.

Details:

- To exploit the potential of unmanned technologies and platforms, the Navy has approved an **unmanned road map**.
- The **economic activities** driven by the river, like inland water transport, fishing, underwater resource exploration and exploitation, etc., can be **efficiently managed with effective UDA**.
- The **security apparatus** responsible for providing a secure atmosphere that can minimise subversive activities both by external and internal elements can be **enhanced with UDA**.
- Effective disaster management is possible with enhanced UDA. With better awareness, the **loss of life and property can be minimised**.

Concern:

The discovery of 'Chinese-origin' autonomous underwater gliders in the Indonesian waters indicate the extent to which **underwater technologies are being harnessed for military advantage by China**.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. AI Powered Grievance Management Application

Why in News

Recently, the Defence Minister launched an **Artificial Intelligence (AI)- powered grievance management application**.

- Earlier, the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** launched an AI-based portal 'SUPACE' in the judicial system aimed at assisting judges with legal research.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - This project is the first of its kind initiative of the Government for **using AI, data science and Machine Learning techniques in grievance redressal**. It is a **citizen centric reform**.
 - It has been developed by the **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** with the **help of IIT-Kanpur**.
 - It will **automatically handle and analyse the complaints** of the people and thus **reduce human intervention, save time and bring more transparency** in their disposal.
- **Significance:**
 - This application will have great use in **understanding the nature of complaints, geographies from where they registered and policy changes which can be introduced** to create systemic improvements to address these grievances.
 - It marks the **introduction of AI-based innovations** in governance and administration. The **success of this project in MoD will pave the way for extension of this application across other Ministries**.
 - A large number of complaints are received on the **CPGRAMS** (Centralized Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System) portal of **DARPG** (Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances).

- CPGRAMS enables the citizen to track online the grievance being followed up with the Department concerned and also enables DARPG to monitor the grievance.

2. UMANG App

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)** has enabled map services in **UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) App**.

- Citizens will be able to find **government facilities nearest to their location**, such as mandis, blood banks and also be able to see these on the most detailed and interactive street and village level maps of India (built by MapmyIndia company).

Key Points

- The UMANG mobile app is a Government of India **all-in-one single, unified, secure, multi-channel, multi-lingual, multi-service mobile app**.
- It provides **access to high impact services of various organizations** of Centre and States. Presently it has 2000+ services.
 - The aim of UMANG is **to fast-track mobile governance** in India.
- UMANG enables **'Ease of Living' for Citizens** by providing easy access to a plethora of Indian government services ranging from – Healthcare, Finance, Education, Housing, Energy, Agriculture, Transport to even Utility and Employment and Skills.
- The key partners of UMANG are **Employee Provident Fund Organization, Direct Benefit Transfer scheme** departments, **Employee State Insurance Corporation**, Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and **Staff Selection Commission (SSC)**.
- UMANG was **developed by the National e-Governance Division (NeGD)**, Ministry of Electronics & IT.
 - It is a **'Digital India'** initiative.
- The **international version called 'UMANG International' was launched in 2020** to mark three years of UMANG.
 - The international version is **for select countries** that include USA, UK, Canada, Australia, UAE, Netherlands, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.
 - It will help Indian international students, NRIs and Indian tourists abroad, to avail Government of India services, anytime.

- It will also help in taking India to the world through 'Indian Culture' services available on UMANG and create interest amongst foreign tourists to visit India.
- UMANG attained '**Best m-Government service'** award at the 6th World Government Summit held at Dubai, UAE in February 2018.

3. School Innovation Ambassador Training Program

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Education Minister and Union Tribal Affairs Minister** jointly launched the **School Innovation Ambassador Training Program (SIATP)**.

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched an **Adi-Prashikshan portal** which is also a repository of training inputs.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The innovative and **one-of-its-kind training program** for school teachers **aims at training 50,000 school teachers** in innovation, entrepreneurship, **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)**, design thinking, product development, idea generation, among others.
 - It will **make Indian teachers, change-agents and ambassadors** of innovation to make our students future-ready.
- **Design & Collaboration:**
 - It has been designed by the **Innovation Cell of the Ministry of Education** and the **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** for school teachers based on its **Innovation Ambassador Training Program for Higher Educational Institution's faculty members**.
 - The training will be delivered in **online mode only**.
 - It is a **collaborative effort** by the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the AICTE.
- **Benefits:**
 - It will **benefit a large number of schools for tribal children across the country** by giving wings to the creativity of the children.
 - It will **nurture lakhs of students with innovation capabilities, develop a culture of innovation** and lay the foundation of a new and vibrant India.
 - The students of **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** will greatly benefit from SIATP since it is also the endeavour of the Tribal Affairs Ministry to give the best possible education to the tribal children.

- EMRS for tribal children is another ambitious programme **under which 740 EMRS will be established in tribal dominated areas over the next three years.**
- It was started in the year **1997-98 to impart quality education to Scheduled Tribe children in remote areas.**
- **Other Important Related Initiatives:**
 - **New National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**
 - **NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement)**
 - **DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing)**
 - **Samagra Siksha**

All India Council for Technical Education

- It was set up in **November 1945 as a national-level apex advisory body.**
- Its purpose was **to conduct a survey on the facilities available for technical education and to promote development in the country in a coordinated and integrated manner.**
- According to the **National Policy of Education (1986)**, AICTE is vested with:
 - Statutory authority for planning, formulation, and maintenance of **norms & standards,**
 - Quality assurance through accreditation,
 - **Funding** in priority areas, monitoring, and evaluation,
 - Maintaining **parity of certification & awards.**
 - The **management of technical education** in the country.

Innovation Cell

- It is **an initiative of the Ministry of Education** to foster the culture of Innovation in all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country.
 - It was **established at AICTE premises in 2018.**
- Its mandate is **to encourage and nurture young students by exposing them to new ideas resulting in innovative activities** in their formative years, fostered through **Network of Innovation Clubs (NIC)** in HEIs.

4. G7's Build Back Better World Initiative

Why in News

The **G7 (Group of Seven) Countries** proposed a '**Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative**' at the recent **47th G7 summit** to **counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).**

Group of Seven

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was formed in **1975**.
- The **bloc meets annually** to discuss **issues of common interest** like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.
- The G7 countries are **the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US**.
 - All the **G7 countries and India** are a part of **G20**.
- The G7 does **not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters**. The decisions taken by leaders during annual summits are non-binding.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It aims to address the **infrastructure investment deficit in developing and lower income countries** - the space which has been increasingly captured by China through 2,600 BRI projects with trillions of dollars of investment.
 - **BRI projects are perceived as corrosive tactics or debt traps** laid by China for its strategic dominance in trade, foreign policy and geopolitics in the world.
 - The **overall focus is on developing transportation, logistics and communications, which would reduce trade and transaction cost for China's trade**, give more market access to Chinese markets and ensure stable supply of energy and other resources.
 - This infrastructure plan is **being led by the United States**.
 - B3W initiative will **provide a transparent infrastructure partnership to help narrow about \$40 trillion** needed by developing nations by 2035.
 - It calls for spending **hundreds of billions of dollars** in collaboration with **the private sector** while **adhering to climate standards and labour practices**.
 - However, the **announcement is yet to be made about how exactly the plan would work or how much capital it would ultimately allocate**.
- **China's BRI:**
 - **About:**
 - It was **launched in 2013**. It involves **development and investment initiatives** that would **stretch from Asia to Europe and beyond**.
 - More than 100 countries **have signed agreements with China** to cooperate in BRI projects like **railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure**.
 - **China's Investment through BRI:**

- Since its inception, **outward investment has been aggressive** as China's **FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)** outflow to inflow ratio increased to 1 from around 0.34 during 2001-10.
- In volume terms, the **FDI outflow increased to an average of \$140 billion in 2016-19 from an annual average \$25 billion** during 2001-10.
- China is **investing in Africa** to lay a comprehensive transportation network. China has **also signed various contacts with the East Asian region**, mostly focusing on transportation, railways, roadways and waterways, for better integration between China and **ASEAN countries**.
- **Important Projects:**
 - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Bangladesh-China, the Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) and the Colombo Port City Project in Sri Lanka, amongst others, are important BRI projects.
 - China has a plan to complete 4,000 km of railways and 10,000 km of highways within the Central Asian region as part of BRI.
- **India's Concerns:**
 - India has expressed concerns about the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, as it traverses through **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**.
 - The massive infrastructure project **connects China's Xinjiang province with Gwadar port** in Pakistan's Balochistan province.
 - India **refused to join the Chinese initiative in the past** and raised its voice against the BRI.
 - India **also sees an adverse trade impact on its products' competitiveness**, market access, resource extraction etc. due to Chinese competition.
- **Significance of B3W:**
 - The **re-emergence of China as a leading global power** is considered to be one of the most significant geo-political events of recent times, alongside the **1991 fall of the Soviet Union** that ended the **Cold War**.
 - China in 1979 had an **economy that was smaller than Italy's**, but after opening to foreign investment and introducing market reforms, it has **become the world's second-largest economy** and is a global leader in a range of new technologies.
 - However, the **West had failed to offer a positive alternative** to the "lack of transparency, poor environmental and labour standards, and coercive approach" of the Chinese government that had left many countries worse off.

Way Forward

- The counter proposal of B3W is certainly a welcome step to contain the adverse implications of a Chinese mega plan. However, B3W lacks coherent thoughts and proper planning at this stage. Nevertheless, it is better late than never.
- Moreover, it remains to be seen what role India will play in B3W since it has been a strong opponent of China's BRI.
- The counter-strategy is necessary to bring down Chinese leverage. A macro view of BRI projects across geography – quantum and pattern of investment – clearly reflects the motive of China-centric international economic integration, production networks, hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and, eventually, the global economy.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Fit for 55 Package: EU

Why in News

Recently, the **European Union (EU)** released a new climate proposal, **the Fit for 55 package**.

- The EU in **December 2020** submitted a **revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** under the **Paris Agreement**.

Key Points

- **Aim:**
 - The new package **attempts to deliver the NDC and carbon neutrality goal through proposed changes** that would impact the economy, society and industry, as well as ensure a **fair, competitive and green transition by 2030 and beyond**.
 - **Climate neutrality** is achieved when a country's emissions are balanced by absorptions and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. It is also expressed as a state of net-zero emissions.
 - It claims to achieve a **balance between "regulatory policies" and market-based carbon pricing** to avoid the pitfalls of each.
- **Major Proposals:**
 - **Renewable Sources:**

- It proposes to **increase the binding target of renewable sources in the EU's energy mix to 40%** (from 32% earlier) and **improve energy efficiency by 36%** (from 32.5% earlier) by 2030.
- **Vehicular Carbon Emissions:**
 - It must be cut by **55% by 2030 and by 100% by 2035**, which means a phaseout of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2035.
 - It also includes some **provisions that benefit the auto industry**. Public funds will be used to help build **charging stations every 60 kilometers, on major highways**, a move that will encourage sales of electric cars.
 - It will also help finance a network of **hydrogen fueling stations**.
- **Emissions Trading System:**
 - It calls for the creation of an **Emissions Trading System (ETS)** for **buildings and road transport**, separate from the EU's current ETS, to become operational from 2026.
 - **ETS** are market-based instruments that create **incentives to reduce emissions** where these are most cost-effective.
- **Social Climate Fund:**
 - To help low-income citizens and small businesses adjust to the new ETS, the EU proposes the creation of a Social Climate Fund, which **will take various forms ranging from funding for renovation of buildings, and access to low carbon transport, to direct income support**.
 - They expect to build up this fund using **25% of revenues from the new ETS**. The current ETS is proposed to extend to the maritime sector between 2023 and 2025.
- **Carbon-Border Adjustment Mechanism:**
 - Among other market-based mechanisms, the EU is proposing a carbon-border adjustment mechanism, which will **put a price on imports from places that have carbon-intensive production processes**.
 - This instrument has been deemed to have a small impact on global carbon dioxide emissions by the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development**, and could instead have negative impacts on developing countries.
- **Enhance Sink Capacity:**
 - It has set a target to **enhance the EU's sink capacity to 310 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent**, which it hopes will be achieved through specific national targets by member countries.
- **Analysis:**
 - The EU's NDC target is to reduce **greenhouse gas** emissions by 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. It has also set a long-term goal of achieving **carbon neutrality by 2050**.

- The EU's target is **more aggressive than that of the US**, which committed to reduce emissions by 40% to 43% over the same period, but **behind Britain**, which pledged a 68% reduction.
- China, the **world's largest emitter**, has only said it aims for emissions to peak by 2030.
- Fit for 55 Package **could put Europe at the forefront of new technologies** like electric car batteries, offshore wind generation or aircraft engines that run on hydrogen.
- But the transition **will also be painful for some consumers and companies**, raising the cost of a wide variety of goods and services, like video monitors imported from China, for example, or a vacation flight to a Greek island or even a full tank of gasoline.
 - Companies that make products destined for obsolescence, like parts for internal combustion engines, **must adapt or go out of business**.
- The proposals **could reshape polluting industries** like steelmaking, which directly employs 330,000 people in the EU.

India's INDC, to be achieved primarily, by 2030

- To **reduce the emissions intensity of the Gross Domestic Product** by about a third.
- A total of **40% of the installed capacity for electricity will be from non-fossil fuel sources**.
- India also promised an **additional carbon sink** (a means to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere) of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through **additional forest and tree cover by the year 2030**.

Indian Initiatives to Fight Climate Change:

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**
- **Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI) emission norms**
- **UJALA scheme**
- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**
- **Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure**
- **International Solar Alliance**

Way Forward

- The **principle of climate justice should guide the negotiations** over the package.
- Fit for 55 **pushes EU decarbonization into higher gear**, marking the visible entry of climate policy into the daily life of all European citizens and companies, and also starting to impact global trade partners.

- Ensuring that the transition is socially fair, both domestically and internationally, is the most important element to make it successful in the long-run.

6. Kisan Sarathi

Why in News

Recently, the **Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR)** celebrated its **93rd foundation day** and on the occasion, the **Kisan Sarathi** platform was launched.

Indian Council of Agriculture Research

- It is an **autonomous organisation** under the **Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE)**, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- It was **established in July 1929** and was formerly known as the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research.
- It is **headquartered at New Delhi**.
- It is the **apex body for coordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture** including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It was jointly launched by the **Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare** and the **Union Minister of Electronics & Information Technology**.
 - It is a **digital platform** to facilitate farmers to get '**right information at right time**' in their desired language.
 - It will help farmers to interact and avail personalised advisories on agriculture and allied areas directly from the respective scientists of **Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs)**.
 - Farmers can also **learn new farming methods** using it.
- **Krishi Vigyan Kendra:**
 - It is an **agricultural extension center in India**. Usually associated with a local agricultural university, these centers serve as the **ultimate link between the ICAR and farmers**, and aim to **apply agricultural research in a practical, localized setting**.
 - It is an **integral part of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS)**.
 - The **first KVK** was established in **1974 at Puducherry**.

- The mandate of KVK is **technology assessment and demonstration** for its application and capacity development.
- KVKs also **produce quality technological products** (seed, planting material, bio-agents, livestock) and make it available to farmers.
- The KVK scheme is **100% financed by the Government of India** and the KVKs are sanctioned to Agricultural Universities, ICAR institutes, related Government Departments and Non Government Organizations (NGOs) working in Agriculture.
- KVKs act as a **bridge between the laboratories and farmland**. According to the Government, these are crucial to fulfilling the target of **doubling farmers' income by 2022**.
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana**
 - **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)**
 - **Soil health card**
 - **Prampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana**
 - **PM Kisan Sampada Yojana**
 - **National Agriculture Market (eNAM)**

7. New Gecko Species: Odisha

Why in News

Recently, Odisha's forest officials have announced measures to preserve the **newly discovered tiny gecko species** of the genus **Hemiphyllodactylus**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - This was **first spotted in Ganjam district, Odisha in 2014**. The new species of *Hemiphyllodactylus minimus* is the **smallest member of the genus** with a maximum body size of little over six cm.
 - It is called **Ganjam Slender Gecko**.
 - The new species is the **seventh Indian species** of the genus, the **second from the northern Eastern Ghats** and 41st globally. It is the **first non-island species** of the genus which is distributed in lowland habitats.
- **Geckos:**
 - Geckos are reptiles and are **found on all the continents except Antarctica**. These colorful lizards have **adapted to habitats from rainforests, to deserts, to cold mountain slopes**.

- **Most geckos are nocturnal**, which means they are active at night, but day geckos are active during the day and **depend on insects, fruits, and flower nectar**.
- **Geckos are spread across six families:** Carphodactylidae, Diplodactylidae, Eublepharidae, Gekkonidae, Phyllodactylidae, and Sphaerodactylidae.
- **Other Species of Gecko in India:**
 - **Indian Golden Gecko** (family Gekkonidae) is native to India (Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh). It is **listed in Schedule 1 of WPA (Wildlife Protection Act)**.
 - **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern (LC)
 - **Tokay Gecko** (family Gekkonidae) is widespread in the Indo-Malayan region **Protection Status:**
 - **Schedule 4** of WPA.
 - **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern (LC).

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following motions can be moved only in Lok Sabha?

1. Censure Motion
2. Cut Motion
3. Non-Confidence Motion
4. Call Attention Motion

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 1 and 2 only
B 2 only
C 1, 2 and 3
D 2, 3 and 4

Answer : C

Explanation

- **Censure Motion:** It should state the reasons for its adoption in the Lok Sabha. It can be moved against an individual minister or a group of ministers or the entire council of ministers.
 - It is moved to censure the council of ministers for specific policies and actions. **It can be moved only in Lok Sabha.**
- A **Cut Motion** is a special power vested in members of the Lok Sabha to oppose a demand being discussed for specific allocation by the government in the Finance Bill as part of the Demand for Grants.
 - If the motion is adopted, it amounts to a no-confidence vote, and if the government fails to jot up numbers in the lower House, it is obliged to resign according to the norms of the House.
 - Cut motion may be moved to reduce the amount of a demand in any of the following ways:
 - Policy Cut Motion: It is moved so that the amount of the demand be reduced to Re.1 (represents disapproval of the policy underlying the demand).
 - Economy Cut Motions: It is moved so that the amount of the demand will be reduced by a specified amount.
 - Token Cut Motions: It is moved so that the amount of the demand is reduced by Rs.100 (expresses a specific grievance).
 - **It can be moved only in Lok Sabha.**
- **Non- Confidence Motion: Article 75 of the Constitution** says that the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.

- In other words, the Lok Sabha can remove the ministry from office by passing a no-confidence motion. The motion needs the support of 50 members to be admitted.
- **It can be moved only in Lok Sabha.**
- **Call Attention Motion:** It is introduced in the Parliament by a member to call the attention of a minister to a matter of urgent public importance, and to seek an authoritative statement from him on that matter.
 - It can be **moved in Rajya Sabha as well as Lok Sabha.**
- **Hence, option C is correct.**

2. With reference to Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPIs), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Interest is paid on PPI balances.
2. Semi-closed PPIs permit cash withdrawal.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- PPIs are instruments that facilitate (a) purchase of goods and services, including financial services, (b) remittances, (c) funds transfers, etc., against the value stored in/on such instruments.
- Interest is not paid on PPI balances.
- Semi-closed System PPIs do not permit cash withdrawal, irrespective of whether they are issued by banks or non-banks.

3. With reference to the Amazon Rainforests, consider the following statements:

1. The Amazon rainforests are tropical rainforests found in Northern South America .
2. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west.

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 : A

Explanation

- **Amazon Rainforests** are large tropical rainforests **occupying the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries in northern South America. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - It is a vast region that spans eight rapidly developing countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana, an overseas territory of France.
 - Tropical forests are closed-canopy forests growing within 28 degrees north or south of the equator.
 - They are very wet places, receiving more than 200 cm rainfall per year, either seasonally or throughout the year.
 - Temperatures are uniformly high - between 20°C and 35°C.
 - Such forests are found in Asia, Australia, Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico and on many of the Pacific Islands.
- Comprising about 40% of Brazil's total area, it is **bounded by the Guiana Highlands to the north, the Andes Mountains to the west (not Pacific Ocean), the Brazilian central plateau to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

4. Both India and South Africa are the members of which of the following multilateral forums?

1. BRICS
2. World Trade Organisation
3. Indian Ocean Rim Association
4. G20

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 1 and 2 only
- B 3 and 4 only
- C 1, 2 and 4
- D 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer : D

Explanation

- **India and South Africa have a long history of working together** by coordinating their views and efforts in institutions of **global governance/multilateral fora**, in order to achieve greater autonomy and ensure that the agenda of 'South' is prioritised.
 - For Example: **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), **IBSA** (India, Brazil, and South Africa), **G20**, **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** and **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.
- Hence, option D is correct.

5. Who among the following acts as the 'Residual Legatee' at the Central level?

- a. Prime Minister
- b. Cabinet Secretary
- c. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister
- d. Secretary to Ministry of Home Affairs

Answer : c

Residual Legatee

- It deals with all such subjects that are not allotted to any ministry/department.
- The Residual Legatee, at the central level is performed by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister who is the administrative head of the PM office (PMO).
- The Chief Secretary is the Residual Legatee at the state level, while the Cabinet Secretary does not perform this legal function at the Centre.

6. Which of the following countries is first to harvest from Space Rice Cultivation?

- a. South Korea
- b. China
- c. Russia
- d. Japan

Answer : b

Space Rice Cultivation

- China has harvested the first batch of Space rice from seeds that went to a 23-day lunar voyage with China's Chang'e-5 in November 2020.
- After being exposed to cosmic radiation and zero gravity, these seeds weighing around 40 gram returned and were harvested at the space breeding research centre of the South China Agricultural University in Guangdong province.



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. The pursuance of a foreign policy, guided by the interest of British imperialism often led to India's conflicts with neighboring countries. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the goals of British Foreign policy.
- Discuss the major reasons conflicts due to British Foreign Policy
- Conclude Suitably.

2Q. At a time when the idea of developing smart cities dominates the policy discourse, India faces challenges due to unplanned urbanisation. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Discuss trend of urbanization in India
- Elaborate on the various areas like homelessness , sanitation, and urban governance vis-a-vis unplanned urbanization
- Suggest a way forward with respect to importance of green field projects, how smart cities can solve this etc.
- Conclude with improvement in existing infrastructure.