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JULY

27.07.2021

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Assam-Mizoram Boundary Dispute

Five Assam police personnel were killed in an exchange of fire with the Mizoram Police after the protracted border row between the two northeastern States took a violent turn.

Assam-Mizoram Boundary Dispute

- At the heart of the dispute over the 165-km Assam-Mizoram boundary are two border demarcations that go back to the days of British colonial rule, and disagreement over which demarcation to follow.
- British tea plantations surfaced in the Cachar plains – the Barak Valley that now comprises the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj – during the mid-19th century.
- Their expansion led to problems with the Mizos whose home was the Lushai Hills.
- In August 1875, the southern boundary of Cachar district was issued in the Assam Gazette.
- The Mizos say this was the fifth time the British had drawn the boundary between the Lushai Hills and the Cachar plains, and the only time when it was done in consultation with Mizo chiefs.

Creation of new states

- But in 1933, the boundary between Lushai Hills and the then princely state of Manipur was demarcated – it said the Manipur boundary began from the trijunction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district of Assam and Manipur state.
- The Mizos do not accept this demarcation, and point to the 1875 boundary which was drawn in consultation with their chiefs.
- In the decades after Independence, states and UTs were carved out of Assam – Nagaland (1963), Arunachal Pradesh (UT 1972, formerly NEFA), Meghalaya (UT 1972), Mizoram (UT 1972).

A matter of perception

- Mizoram says Assam has been pushing its people 10-12 km inside their territory.
- Mizoram's official stand is that the boundary should be demarcated on the basis of notification in 1875 that distinguished the Lushai Hills (erstwhile district of Assam that became Mizoram) from the plains of Cachar.
- The notification is based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873, which makes it obligatory for Indians beyond to possess a travel document to enter Mizoram.
- Assam also has border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland.

2. Emigration Bill 2021 does not go far enough

Context

The Emigration Bill 2021 could be introduced in Parliament soon and presents a long-overdue opportunity to reform the recruitment process for nationals seeking employment abroad.

An overview of Emigration Act 1983

- Labour migration is governed by the **Emigration Act, 1983**.
- The Act sets up a mechanism for hiring through **government-certified recruiting agents** – individuals or public or private agencies.
- It outlines obligations for agents to **conduct due diligence** of prospective employers,
- Sets up a **cap on service fees**.
- Establishes a government review of worker travel and employment documents (known as emigration clearances) to 18 countries mainly in West Asian states and South-East Asian countries.

What are the improvements in Emigration Bill 2021?

- It launches a new **emigration policy division**.
- It establishes **help desks and welfare committees**.
- It requires manpower agencies to conduct **pre-departure briefings** for migrants.
- It **increases accountability of brokers** and other intermediaries who are also involved in labour hiring.

Shortcoming in Emigration Bill 2021

- **Lacks human rights framework:** The 2021 Bill lacks a human rights framework aimed at **securing the rights of migrants** and their families.
- For example, in a country such as the Philippines, it explicitly recognises the contributions of Filipino workers and “the dignity and fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Filipino citizens”.
- **Workers to bear recruitment payments and service charges:** the Bill permits manpower agencies to charge workers’ service fees, and even allows agents to set their own limits.
- This provision goes against International Labour Organization (ILO) Private Employment Agencies **Convention No. 181** and the ILO general principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment.
- The ILO Convention and guidelines recognises that it is **employers, not workers who should bear recruitment payments** including the costs of their visas, air travel, medical exams, and service charges to recruiters.
- **Criminalise worker:** The Bill permits government authorities to **punish workers by cancelling or suspending their passports** and imposing fines up to ₹50,000 for violating any of the Bill’s provisions.
- Criminalising the choices migrant workers make is deplorable, runs contradictory to the purpose of protecting migrants and their families, and **violates international human rights standards.**
- Recruiters and public officials **could misuse the law** to instil fear among workers and report or threaten to report them.
- **Gender dimension not adequately addressed:** This Bill does not also adequately reflect the gender dimensions of labour migration where women have limited agency in recruitment compared to their counterparts.
- Women are more likely to be employed in marginalised and informal sectors and/or isolated occupations in which **labour, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse** are common.
- **Limited space for representation:** The Bill also provides limited space for worker representation or civil society engagement in the policy and welfare bodies that it sets up.

Way forward

- The Ministry of External Affairs must start at the top, and draft a clearer purpose which explicitly recognises the contributions of Indian workers, the unique challenges they face, and uphold the dignity and human rights of migrants and their families.

Conclusion

The new Bill is better than the Emigration Act 1983, but more reforms are needed to protect Indian workers.

3. Suspension of FCRA Certificate

Why in News

The **Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)** has challenged the suspension of its **Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) certificate** for 180 days.

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** suspended CHRI's certificate in violation of various provisions of the FCRA Act.

Key Points

- **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010:**
 - Foreign funding of persons in India is regulated under **FCRA act** and is implemented by the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
 - **Individuals** are permitted to accept foreign contributions **without permission of MHA**.
 - However, the **monetary limit for acceptance** of such foreign contributions **shall be less than Rs. 25,000**.
 - The Act ensures that the recipients of foreign contributions adhere to the stated purpose for which such contribution has been obtained.
 - Under the Act, organisations are required to register themselves every five years.
- **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2020:**
 - **Prohibition to accept foreign contribution:** The Act bars public servants from receiving foreign contributions. Public servant includes any person who is in service or paid by the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.
 - **Transfer of foreign contribution:** The Act prohibits the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person not registered to accept foreign contributions.
 - **Aadhaar for registration:** The Act makes Aadhaar number mandatory for all office bearers, directors or key functionaries of a person receiving foreign contribution, as an identification document.

- **FCRA account:** The Act states that foreign contributions must be received only in an account designated by the bank as FCRA account in such branches of the State Bank of India, New Delhi.
- **Reduction in use of foreign contribution for administrative purposes:** The Act proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. In FCRA 2010, the limit was 50%.
- **Surrender of certificate:** The Act allows the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate.
- **Other Regulations:**
 - **Widening the Scope of Foreign Contribution:** Under the issued regulations, donations given in Indian rupees (INR) by any foreigner/foreign source including foreigners of Indian origin like **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)** or Person of India Origin (PIO) cardholders should also be treated as foreign contribution.
 - **Meeting the Standards of FATF:** The guidelines mandate that good practices should be followed by NGOs in accordance with standards of the global financial watchdog- **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**.
 - It asked NGOs to inform the Ministry about “suspicious activities” of any donor or recipient and “take due diligence of its employees at the time of recruitment.”
- **Argument of CHRI:**
 - The suspension order is contrary to the framework of the scheme set out under the FCRA Act and even the **suspension was passed without initiating any inquiry.**
 - The suspension order was based on wholly incorrect facts and violates basic **principles of natural justice.**
- **Issues Related to FCRA:**
 - **Scope not defined:** It prohibits the receipt of foreign contributions “for any activities detrimental to the national interest” or the “economic interest of the state”.
 - However, there is no clear guidance on what constitutes “public interest”.
 - **Limits Fundamental Rights:** The FCRA restrictions have serious consequences on both the rights to free speech and freedom of association under **Articles 19(1)(a)** and **19(1)(c)** of the Constitution.

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

- CHRI is an **independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation**, working for the practical realisation of human rights across the Commonwealth.

- **Headquarters:** New Delhi

The Commonwealth

- **Origin:** It is one of the world's oldest political associations of states. Its roots go back to the British Empire when some countries were ruled directly or indirectly by Britain.
 - Some of these countries became self-governing while retaining Britain's monarch as Head of State. They formed the British **Commonwealth of Nations**.
 - In 1949, the Commonwealth came into being. Since then, independent countries from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Pacific have joined the Commonwealth.
- **Membership:** The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 independent and equal sovereign states.
 - Membership is based on free and equal voluntary cooperation. Rwanda and Mozambique - have no historical ties to the British Empire.

Way Forward

- Excessive regulation on foreign contribution may affect working of the NGOs which are helpful in implementing government schemes at the grassroots. They fill the gaps, where the government fails to do their jobs.
- The regulation should not hamper sharing of resources across national boundaries essential to the functioning of a global community, and should not be discouraged unless there is reason to believe the funds are being used to aid illegal activities.

4. India 'engages Taliban' but questions Pakistan's support

Context:

India's multi-track strategy in engaging all stakeholders in Afghanistan.

Issue:

- Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan have capitalised on the **last stages of the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops to launch offensives**.
- The Taliban is attempting to acquire territory to the south and border posts of Afghanistan.
- It is expected to accelerate its efforts to take major cities once the U.S. completes its pull-out of troops.

- Assessments have found that while the Taliban holds territory considerably less than media speculation of “85%”.
 - Its hold is believed to be about “45-50%”.
 - However the major cause of concern is that Taliban in a position to establish control of one or more of the southern provinces including Kandahar, Helmand, Ghazni and Paktia.

Details:

- The coming months would be crucial to decide Afghanistan’s future. India as a neighbour is concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and has participated in the talks **in Doha, Dushanbe, Moscow, Tehran and Tashkent**, all of which focused on the situation in Afghanistan and India’s concerns about Pakistan’s role.
- In the backdrop of **advancement of the Taliban militants on the ground, India is engaging all stakeholders in Afghanistan, including some parts of the Taliban.**
- The talks with the militant signify that a **negotiated power-sharing agreement** is now seen as the best case scenario for Afghanistan.
- India believes that the **S. air support and international financial assistance would be necessary** to defend against the Taliban’s onslaught. It believes that there is a need to keep a check on **Pakistan’s continued support to the Taliban.**

India’s concerns:

- It is not clear how much the U.S. is willing to criticise Pakistan publicly about its role in assistance to Taliban, given that it is deeply engaged with its military and political leadership on **pushing the Taliban towards a peace agreement before the U.S. pulls out all its troops.**
- Additionally, earlier this month, the U.S. also announced a **new connectivity ‘Quad’ comprising U.S.-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan.** The move is seen as part of the U.S.’s search for a role in Afghanistan post-pullout.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary proposed as Ramsar Site

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region is likely to get its first Ramsar site at the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary.

Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary

- The Maharashtra Government has declared the area along the western bank of Thane Creek as the “Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary” since 2015.
- It is Maharashtra’s second marine sanctuary after the Malvan sanctuary.
- It is recognized as an “Important Bird Area” by the Bombay Natural History Society.

About Ramsar Convention

- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (better known as the Ramsar Convention) is an international agreement promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem.
- The convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.
- Traditionally viewed as a wasteland or breeding ground of disease, wetlands actually provide fresh water and food and serve as nature’s shock absorber.
- Wetlands, critical for biodiversity, are disappearing rapidly, with recent estimates showing that 64% or more of the world’s wetlands have vanished since 1900.
- Major changes in land use for agriculture and grazing, water diversion for dams and canals, and infrastructure development are considered to be some of the main causes of loss and degradation of wetlands.

What does one mean by Ramsar Site?

- A Ramsar Site is a wetland area designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
- It provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

6. Tackling the Menace of Black Money

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Minister of State for Finance** has stated in **Lok Sabha** that the **government's black money law** has helped detect several instances where Indians have been found stashing undisclosed income overseas.

Key Points

- **Black Money:**
 - There is **no official definition of black money in economic theory**, with several different terms such as parallel economy, black money, black incomes, unaccounted economy, illegal economy and irregular economy all being used more or less synonymously.
 - The simplest definition of black money could possibly be **money that is hidden from tax authorities**.
 - It can come from two broad categories:
 - **Illegal Activity:**
 - Money that is earned through illegal activity is obviously not reported to the tax authorities, and so is black.
 - **Legal but Unreported Activity:**
 - The second category comprises income from legal activity that is not reported to the tax authorities.
- **Impacts:**
 - **Loss of Revenue:**
 - Black money eats up a part of the tax and, thus, the **government's deficit increases**.
 - The government has to **balance this deficit by increasing taxes, decreasing subsidies and increasing borrowings**.
 - Borrowing leads to a further **increase in the government's debt due to interest burden**. If the government is unable to balance the deficit, it has to decrease spending, which affects development.
 - **Money Circulation:**
 - People generally tend to keep black money in the form of **gold, immovable property and other secret manners**.
 - Such money does not become part of the main economy and, therefore, remains generally out of circulation.
 - The black money keeps circulating among the wealthy and creates more opportunities for them.
 - **Higher Inflation:**
 - The infusion of **unaccounted black money** in the economy **leads to higher inflation**, which obviously hits the poor the most.
 - It also increases the disparity between the rich and the poor.
- **Government's Initiatives:**
 - **Legislative Action:**
 - **The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018**
 - **The Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017**
 - **The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016**

- The **Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015**
- **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.**
- **International Cooperation:**
 - **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs):**
 - India is proactively engaging with foreign governments with a view to facilitate and enhance the exchange of information under Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs)/Tax Information Exchange Agreements (TIEAs)/Multilateral Conventions.
 - **Automatic Exchange of Information:**
 - **India has been a leading force** in the efforts to forge a **multilateral regime** for proactive sharing of **financial information** known as **Automatic Exchange of Information** which will greatly assist the global efforts to combat tax evasion.
 - The Automatic Exchange of Information based on Common Reporting Standard has commenced from 2017 enabling **India to receive financial account information of Indian residents in other countries.**
 - **Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act of USA:**
 - **India has entered into an information sharing agreement** with the USA under the act.

Way Forward

Since, black money menace is still untamed, therefore a lot more needs to be done to tackle it. Some of the strengthening steps that can be taken are:

- **Appropriate legislative framework related to:** Public Procurement, Prevention of Bribery of foreign officials, citizens grievance redressal, **whistleblower** protection, **UID Aadhar.**
- **Setting up and strengthening institutions dealing with illicit money:** Directorate of Criminal Investigation Cell for Exchange of Information, Income Tax Overseas Units- ITOUs at Mauritius and Singapore have been very useful, Strengthening the Foreign TAX, Tax Research and Investigation Division of the CBDT.
- **Electoral Reforms:** Elections are one of the biggest channels to utilize the black money. Appropriate reforms to reduce money power in elections.
- **Imparting skills to personnel for effective action:** Both domestic and international training pertaining to the concerned area. For instance, the **Financial Intelligence Unit-India** makes proactive efforts to regularly upgrade the skills of its employees by providing them opportunities for

training on anti-money laundering, terrorist financing, and related economic issues.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Kargil Vijay Diwas

Why in News

The 22nd anniversary of **Kargil Vijay Diwas** was observed on the 26th of July 2021.

- The day is dedicated to the martyred soldiers of the Kargil war.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - After the Indo-Pak war of 1971, there had been many military conflicts. Both the countries conducted nuclear tests in 1998 which further escalated tensions and finally the Kargil War in 1999.
 - Kargil War, also known as the Kargil conflict, was fought between **May-July of 1999 in the Kargil** (now a district in the UT of Ladakh) **district of Jammu and Kashmir** along the **Line of Control (LoC)** in which India got the victory.
- **Operation Vijay:**
 - In the **year 1999**, India and Pakistan signed the Lahore Agreement **to mutually resolve the Kashmir issue in a peaceful manner**.
 - However, the **Pakistani troops began infiltrating toward Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) under Operation Badr**, hoping to cut off Indian Troops in Siachen. Indian Army responded by launching Operation Vijay.

- On 3rd May 1999, **Pakistan started this war** when it had infiltrated into the high altitudes in the rocky mountainous region of Kargil with around 5000 soldiers and captured it.
- When the Indian Government got the information about it, '**Operation Vijay**' was launched by the Indian army to throw back the intruders who had treacherously occupied Indian Territory.

2. The convergence and lag in Indo-US partnership

Context

As the Indian leadership reviews US ties this week with the visiting Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, a paradox stands out.

Deepening Indo-US ties

- India and the US have come a long way since the 1990s.
- There is growing **political and security cooperation**, expanding economic engagement, widening interface between the two societies, and the intensifying footprint of the Indian diaspora in the US.
- **Convergence of interests:** That ambition, in turn, is based on the unprecedented convergence of Indian and American national interests.
- **Agenda for cooperation:** The two countries have already agreed on an ambitious agenda for **bilateral, regional and global cooperation**.

Debate in India over Indo-US relation: A paradox

- The discourse within India's strategic community continues to be anxious.
- Some of the questions that animate the media and political classes have not changed since the 1990s.
- **Issues in the debate:** Debate focuses on US's stand on the Kashmir issue, democracy and human rights and its impact on India-US relations.
- **Contradictory fears:** There are also contradictory fears such as whether the US extend full support in coping with China.
- While we expect the US to give guarantees on supporting us, we insist that **India will never enter into an alliance with the US**.
- **Small state syndrome in India:** As India's relative weight in the international system continues to grow, it creates much room for give and take between India and the US.
- Yet, a small state syndrome continues to **grip the foreign policy elite**.
- The situation is similar on the economic front.
- Although India is now **the sixth-largest economy in the world**, there is unending concern about the US imposing globalisation on India.

- Even as India's salience for solutions to climate change has increased, India's debate remains deeply defensive.

Factors responsible paradox

- **Missing the big picture:** The **narrow focus** on the bilateral **precludes an assessment of the larger forces** shaping American domestic and international politics.
- That, in turn, limits the appreciation of **new possibilities** for the bilateral relationship.
- **Underinvestment in American studies:** The problem is reinforced by India's under-investment in public understanding of American society.
- Russia and China have put large resources in American studies at their universities and think tanks.
- The Indian government and private sector will hopefully address this gap in the not-too-distant future.

Policy shifts unfolding in the US

- **Domestic economic policies:** If the economic policy drift in the last four decades was to the right, Biden is moving left on the **relationship between the state and the market** – on raising taxes, increasing public spending and addressing the problem of sharp economic inequality.
- **Economic policy and globalisation:** Biden has also joined Trump in questioning America's uncritical economic globalisation of the past.
- If Trump talked of putting America First, Biden wants to make sure that America's foreign and economic policies serve the US middle class.
- **Foreign policy:** Biden has concluded that four decades of America's uncritical engagement with China must be reconstituted into a policy that faces up to the many challenges that Beijing presents to the US.
- Biden is also focused on renewing the traditional US alliances to present a united front against China.
- He is also seeking to overcome **Washington's hostility to Russia** by resetting ties with Moscow.

Question of democracy and human rights

- Democracy is very much part of America's founding ideology.
- But living up to that ideal at home and abroad has not been easy for the United States over the last two centuries.
- Delhi and Washington will also have much to discuss on the challenges that new **surveillance technologies and big tech monopolies** pose to democratic governance.

- The exclusive American focus on democracy promotion has been rare, costly and unsuccessful.
- India's own experience at **spreading democracy in its neighbourhood is quite similar.**
- But that discussion is only one part of the expansive new agenda – from **Afghanistan to Indo-Pacific**, reforming global economic institutions to addressing climate change, and **vaccine diplomacy** to governing new technologies that beckon India and the United States.

Conclusion

As they intensify the bilateral cooperation, the two sides will hopefully turn the Indo-US partnership from a perennial curiosity to a quotidian affair.

3. Garib Nawaz Employment Scheme

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Minister for Minority Affairs** replied in the Parliament that a **total number of 371 training centers under Gharib Nawaz Employment Scheme were opened** across the country.

Key Points

- **About Gharib Nawaz Employment Scheme:**
 - It was **launched by the Ministry of Minority Affairs in 2017.**
 - **Maulana Azad Education Foundation**, an autonomous body under the aegis of Ministry of Minority Affairs, implements the Scheme.
 - The main aim of this scheme is **to provide short term job oriented skill development courses to minorities' youth** in order to enable them for skill based employment.
 - This scheme is implemented **as per common norms of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSD&E)** through the empanelled **Program Implementation Agencies (PIAs).**
 - The PIA is **mandated to place minimum 70% trainees** out of total trained trainees.
 - The **monthly stipend for maximum of three months and post placement support for maximum of two months** after getting employment are also being paid to the beneficiaries directly into their account.

Minorities

- The term "Minority" is not defined in the Indian Constitution. However, the Constitution recognises only religious and linguistic minorities.
 - **6 Minority Communities in India:** Jain, Parsi, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh and Muslim (notified by the Government).
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 29:** It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, shall have the right to conserve the same.
 - It grants protection to both religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities.
 - **Article 30:** Under the article, all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
 - The protection under Article 30 is confined only to minorities (religious or linguistic) and does not extend to any section of citizens (as under Article 29).
 - **Article 350-B:** The 7th Constitutional (Amendment) Act 1956 inserted this article which provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President of India.
- **Legal Provisions:**
 - National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act, 1992.
 - National Commission for Minority Education Institution (NCMEI) Act, 200
- **Other Schemes for Minority Communities:**
 - Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme
 - Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram
 - Seekho aur Kamao
 - Usttad (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development)
 - Garib Nawaz Kaushal Vikas Yojana
 - Nai Manzil (for formal skilling of school dropouts)
 - Nai Roshni (for leadership Development of Minority Women)
 - Begum Hazrat Mahal Girls scholarships

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Russia's Nauka Module for ISS

Pirs, a Russian module on the International Space Station (ISS) used as a docking port for spacecraft and as a door for cosmonauts to go out on spacewalks. In its place, Russia's space agency Roscosmos will be attaching a significantly larger module called Nauka.

What does Russia's new Nauka module do?

- Nauka, which is 42 feet long and weighs 20 tonnes, was supposed to be launched as early as 2007, as per the ISS's original plan.
- Nauka – meaning “science” in Russian – is the biggest space laboratory Russia has launched to date, and will primarily serve as a research facility.
- It is also bringing to the ISS another oxygen generator, a spare bed, another toilet, and a robotic cargo crane built by the European Space Agency (ESA).
- The new module was sent into orbit using a Proton rocket – the most powerful in Russia's space inventory – on July 21, and will take eight days to reach the ISS.

What kind of research goes on at the International Space Station?

- A space station is essentially a large spacecraft that remains in low-earth orbit for extended periods of time.
- It is like a large laboratory in space and allows astronauts to come aboard and stay for weeks or months to carry out experiments in microgravity.
- For over 20 years since its launch, humans have continuously lived and carried out scientific investigations on the \$150 billion ISS under microgravity conditions, being able to make breakthroughs in research not possible on Earth.

5. The limits of sectoral growth

Context

The latest estimates of the fourth quarter of financial year 2020-21 (January-March) brought some relief, for policymakers.

Interpreting the construction sector GVA increase

- The construction sector showed a 15 per cent increase in gross value added (GVA) in the last quarter, which is nearly double the growth experienced by the sector in the previous year (7.7 per cent).
- **Sign of better times:** The buoyant growth of this sector has been hailed by policymakers not just as a sign of better times to come,
- **Addressing distress:** Growth in the construction sector is also considered as the capacity of the economy to address the distress that households have faced in the past year.
- **Addressing needs of workforce:** The Chief Economic Advisor pointed to the high growth rates in construction possibly to indicate that growth would address the **needs of the beleaguered workforce**.
- The Union budget 2021 has also allocated a considerable sum towards **infrastructure and construction** in the hopes of the sector playing a catalysing role.

Issues with relying on the growth of high-employment sector

- **No strong correlation:** While GVA and/or GDP are considered as indicators of economic health, it has been argued in detail how **it may not be prudent to rely on these alone** as measures of economic welfare.
- In particular, mere growth in a sector may not necessarily translate into benefits for its workers.
- In the last quarter of 2019-2020, when construction GVA grew at nearly 8 per cent, employment in the same sector grew by 3 per cent based on our estimates from CMIE-CPHS.
- **Fallback employment option:** The fact that employment grew in this sector even during a crisis year is largely because of the fact that the construction sector emerged as a fallback employment option for many displaced workers.
- During “normal” times, the sector typically employs only about 10-15 per cent of India’s total workforce.
- Even if this sector were to expand in line with its GVA growth, it will not be able to provide employment beyond a certain level.
- **Employment alone is not enough:** Moreover, employment alone is not enough.
- Earnings for an average daily wage worker in the sector have actually **declined** this year.
- Again, the overall economic growth in GVA in the sector has not been passed on to the workers.

Way forward

- Any relief effort that relies solely on economic growth as a means to uplift workers will be sorely inadequate as we see from the experience of workers in construction.
- The need of the hour is to go beyond relying on sectoral growth as a means of delivering relief to workers.
- **Direct transfers of cash and food** are also needed, as is livelihood support through employment guarantee programmes.

Conclusion

While boosting growth of high-employment sectors is one strategy to adopt, this has its limitations. The capacity of a sector is limited in terms of the number of workers that it can absorb, and the extent to which growth can benefit workers.

6. Exercise Cutlass Express 2021

Indian Naval Ship Talwar is participating in Exercise Cutlass Express 2021, being conducted along the East Coast of Africa.

Exercise Cutlass Express

- The exercise is an annual maritime exercise conducted to promote national and regional maritime security in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean.
- Indian Navy is participating in the exercise in a 'trainer role'.

The 2021 edition of the exercise involves the participation of:

- 12 Eastern African countries, US, UK, India
- Various international organizations like International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Interpol, European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR), Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO), and EUCAP Somalia

Focus of the exercise

- The exercise focuses on East Africa's coastal regions.
- It is designed to assess and improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security and increase interoperability between the regional navies.
- As part of the exercise, the Indian Navy, together with other partners, shall undertake the training of contingents from various participating countries in various fields across the spectrum of maritime security operations.

7. India's Forest Cover & Wasteland

Why in News

Recently, the Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) informed **Rajya Sabha** about the **forest area in the country**.

- The data provided was as per the **India State of Forest Report, 2019** that is the **16th biennial assessment of India's forests** by Forest Survey of India, Dehradun an organisation under the MoEFCC.
- Information about the **Wasteland** in the country was also provided as per the **Wasteland Atlas, 2019**.

Key Points

- **Definition of Forest:**
 - The word '**forest**' is not defined in any Central Forest Act, namely the **Indian Forest Act (1927)**, or the **Forest Conservation Act (1980)**.
 - The Central government has **not laid down any criterion to define forest**.
 - The Indian Forest Act, 1927 **gives states the rights to notify Reserved Forests in their areas**.
 - States are responsible for determining their definition of forests; this prerogative stems from a **Supreme Court** order called the **T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs the Union of India 1996** judgment.
 - In the judgement, the **Supreme Court** interpreted that the word "forest" must be understood according to its "**dictionary meaning**".
 - This description covers **all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise**.
- **Total Forest Area:**
 - The recorded forest area in the country is **7,67,419 sq km**, however the ministry has so far **not quantified the forest area that has been under dispute**.
- **Category-Wise Forest:**
 - **Reserved Forests category:**
 - It is under **direct supervision of the Government**.
 - **No public entry** allowed for the commercial purpose of cattle grazing.
 - Total area under this category is **4,34,853 sq km**.
 - **Protected Forests category:**

- It is **looked after by the government.**
- **Local people are allowed** to collect forest produce and cattle grazing without causing any serious damage.
- Total area under this category is **2,18,924 sq km.**
- **Unprotected Forest Category:**
 - They are unclassified Forests.
 - No restriction on cutting trees or grazing cattle.
 - Total area under this category is **1,13,642 sq km.**
- **Wasteland:**
 - As per the **Wasteland Atlas, 2019**, published by the Ministry of Rural Development, the **total wasteland in the country is 5,57,665.51 sq km.**
 - Wasteland is defined not as desertified land, but **land that is not used for agriculture, commercial use or as forest land.**
 - For instance, it could use grasslands that are used by communities for grazing.
- **Governments Initiatives:**
 - **National Mission for a Green India:**
 - It is one of the eight Missions under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).**
 - It was launched in February, 2014 with the objective **to safeguard the biological resources of our nation and associated livelihoods against the peril of adverse climate change** and to recognise the vital impact of forestry on ecological sustainability, biodiversity conservation and food-, water- and livelihood-security
 - **National Afforestation Programme (NAP):**
 - It has been implemented since 2000 for the afforestation of degraded forest lands.
 - It is being implemented by the MoEFCC.
 - **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority, (CAMPA Funds):**
 - Launched in 2016, **90% of the fund is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre.**
 - The **funds can be used for** treatment of catchment areas, assisted natural generation, forest management, wildlife protection and management, relocation of villages from protected areas, managing human-wildlife conflicts, training and awareness generation, supply of wood saving devices and allied activities.
 - **National Action Programme to Combat Desertification:**
 - It was **prepared in 2001 to address issues of increasing desertification** and to take appropriate actions.
 - It is implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Constitutional Provisions for Forests

- Forests are included in the **Concurrent List** in the (Seventh Schedule) of the Constitution of India.
- Through the **42nd Amendment Act, 1976** Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds were transferred from State to Concurrent List.
- **Article 51 A (g)** of the Constitution states that it shall be the **fundamental duty** of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests and Wildlife.
- **Article 48 A** in the **Directive Principles of State policy**, mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

Legislations

- India's forests are currently governed by the **National Forest Policy, 1988** which has environmental balance and livelihood at its centre.
- The **Scheduled Tribes And Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition Of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** recognizes the rights of the forest dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent for a variety of needs, including livelihood, habitation and other socio-cultural needs.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding 'Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)':

1. CBDR is a principle within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. The principle of CBDR is enshrined in Earth Summit 1992, held in Rio de Janeiro.

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

- **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)** is a principle within the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - It acknowledges different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change.
 - The principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ evolved from the notion of the ‘common heritage of mankind’.
- The **principle of CBDR is enshrined in Earth Summit 1992**, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- CBDR is based on two elements of responsibilities:
 - One is the common responsibility of all the states to cater to the concerns of environmental protection and sustainable development.
 - Another is of differentiated responsibility enabling the states to act, for environment protection, in their national capacity and as per their national priority.

2. Which of the following statements best describes NASA’s Artemis?

- a. It is a supersonic parachute that will help NASA missions to land on Mars
- b. It is NASA’s program to return astronauts to the lunar surface.
- c. It is a telescope specially designed to detect X-ray emissions from very hot regions of the Universe
- d. It is a mission that will image regions beyond the Sun’s outer corona

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Artemis is NASA’s program to return astronauts to the lunar surface by 2024.
- NASA wants to send the first woman and the next man to the Moon by the year 2024, which it plans on doing through the Artemis lunar exploration program.
- ARTEMIS stands for Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon’s Interaction with the Sun.

3. With reference to the 'Gross Environment Product' (GEP), consider the following statements:

1. The GEP is the product and service value that the ecosystem provides for human welfare and economic and social sustainable development
2. GEP is one of the components of Green Gross Domestic Product (Green GDP).

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

- Recently, the **Uttarakhand government** has announced that it will **initiate valuation of its natural resources** in the form of '**Gross Environment Product**' (GEP).
- It is along the lines of **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**.
- **GEP** was established back in **1997** by ecological economists like **Robert Costanza at the global level**.
 - It is an **assessment system to measure ecological status**. It is considered as the **product and service value that the ecosystem provides for human welfare and economic and social sustainable development**, including provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem services. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - Overall, GEP accounts for the economic value of the ecosystem in providing products and services, and it is one of the **components of green GDP**. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - The **green gross domestic product (green GDP)** is an **indicator of economic growth with environmental factors taken into consideration** along with the standard GDP of a country. It factors **biodiversity losses and costs attributed to climate change**.
 - The value of ecosystem services is about **twice as much as the global GDP**. Therefore, it would **help in the conservation of the environment** and also help save us from the **effects of climate change**.

4. The Supreme Court of India declared the Right to Privacy as a fundamental right in which of the following cases?

- A Kesavananda Bharati vs. State of Kerala
- B Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India
- C SR Bommai vs. Union of India
- D AK Gopalan vs. State of Madras

Answer : B

Explanation

- The “Right to Privacy” is an integral part of Article 21 of the Constitution (Right to Life).
 - An individual’s right to privacy is governed by the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019.
- In 2017, the Right to Privacy was declared a fundamental right by the Supreme Court in its landmark judgement in the case of **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India, 2017**.
 - The court said that, “the right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution”.
- **Hence, option B is correct.**

5. Which of the following Reports & Indices are released by the National Statistical Office (NSO)?

1. Index of Industrial Production (IIP)
2. Consumer Price Index (CPI)
3. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer : D

Explanation

- The **National Statistical Office (NSO)** is the central statistical agency of the Government mandated under the Statistical Services Act 1980 under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
 - It is responsible for the development of arrangements for providing statistical information services to meet the needs of the Government and other users for information on which to base policy, planning, monitoring and management decisions.
 - The services include collecting, compiling and disseminating official statistical information.
- **The Reports & Indices by NSO are:**
 - **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**
 - **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**
 - Sustainable Development Goals National Indicator Framework Progress Report
 - **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**
- **Hence, option D is correct.**

6. Renewable Integration in India Report is launched by NITI Aayog along with which of the following organizations?

- a. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- b. International Renewable Energy Agency (IREA)
- c. International Energy Agency (IEA)
- d. Energy Information Administration (EIA)

Answer : c

Renewable Integration in India Report

- Key findings of the report are as follows
1. India is the third largest energy consuming country in the world
 2. Per capita electricity consumption is still around a third of the world average.
 3. Majority of India's renewable capacity additions take the form of solar and wind.
 4. Renewable energy penetration is highly variable within states of India.

Mains Practice Questions

1. More than a year after the e-waste management rules were notified, there is little evidence that it is being implemented. Examine the causes behind India's problem of e-waste and the reasons due to which rules have been ineffective. (250 words)

Approach:

- Explain what is e-waste and state key features of the e-waste management rules in India.
- State causes behind e-waste generation.
- List the loopholes in the rules and their implementation.
- Suggest steps that can be taken to manage increasing e-waste in the country.

2. Even though child mortality in India has reduced significantly, the numbers are still the highest in the world. Discuss the reason behind the persistence in high rate of child mortality in the country and highlight the steps taken by the government in this regard. (250 words)

Approach:

- Explain child mortality with latest child mortality figures and improvement in them.
- Give reasons for persistence of high rate of child mortality.
- Mandate- constitutional obligation, SDGs
- Discuss steps taken by government
- Conclude with how better monitoring and implementation will help improve the situation

