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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations**1. No landless farmers in National Farmers Database****In news**

- The Central Government's new National Farmers Database will only include land-owning farmers for now as it will be **linked to digitised land records**.
- A data policy is being prepared specifically for the agriculture sector in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- The Government can make use of the database for targeted service delivery with higher efficiency.
- It is the first step for the initiative that would serve as the core of the Agristack.

What is Agristack?

- AgriStack is a collection of technologies and digital databases that focuses on farmers and the agricultural sector.
- AgriStack will create a unified platform for farmers to provide them end to end services across the agriculture food value chain.
- It is in line with the Centre's Digital India programme, aimed at providing a broader push to digitise data in India, from land titles to medical records.
- Each farmer will have a unique digital identification (farmers' ID) that contains personal details,
- Each ID will be linked to the individual's digital national ID Aadhaar.
- **Benefits**
 - Problems such as inadequate access to credit and information, pest infestation, crop wastage, can be addressed by use of digital technology
 - It will increase innovation and investment towards the agricultural sector

2. Needed, a more unified Asian voice for Afghanistan

In news: In the backdrop of US pull out of troops from Afghanistan, three recent meetings are turning the spotlight on the Central Asia's role in dealing with the situation in Afghanistan

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contact group on Afghanistan
- SCO Defence Ministers in Tajikistan,
- Central and South Asia conference on regional connectivity in Uzbekistan

Concerns for India in Central Asia

- The same powers that invaded Afghanistan post 9/11, and declared the Taliban leadership as UNSC-designated terrorists, are now advocating talks with the Taliban
- India's original **hesitation in opening talks with the Taliban** has cut India out of the current reconciliation process.
- The end of any formal dialogue between **India and Pakistan** since 2016 and trade since 2019, have resulted in Pakistan blocking India's over-land access to Afghanistan
- **India's alternative route through Chabahar**, though operational, cannot be viable or cost-effective also long as U.S. sanctions on Iran are in place.
- India's boycott of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) make another route to Afghanistan off-limits.
- U.S. has announced a new, surprise formation of a "Quad" on regional connectivity – U.S.-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan that does not include India
- All the above portends to India's narrowing window of engagement in Central Asia.

What are the calculation of Central Asian neighbours?

- **Necessity of Afghanistan for access to Ocean:** First is that prosperity for these land-locked countries can only flow from access through Afghanistan to the closest ocean, i.e. the Indian Ocean.
- **Need for Taliban's Support:** Second, all transit through Afghanistan depends on guarantees of safe passage from the Taliban, backed by the group's mentors in Pakistan. Therefore, Central Asian countries have been at the forefront of mediation of talks with Taliban.
- **Alignment with China:** Third, all five Central Asian Countries are now a part of China's BRI. Tying their connectivity initiatives with Beijing's BRI will bring the double promise of investment and some modicum of control over Pakistan.

Given the above, New Delhi's room for manoeuvre with the five Central Asian countries on Afghanistan appears limited.

Way Ahead for India

- **Realizing Common Concerns:** India and the Central Asian States share common concerns about an Afghanistan overrun by the Taliban and under Pakistan's thumb: the worries of battles at their borders, safe havens for jihadist terror groups inside Afghanistan and the spill-over of radicalism into their own countries.
- **Supporting Afghan Government:** India to work with Central Asian states, and other neighbours to shore up finances for the Afghanistan government to ensure that the government structure does not collapse
- **Fighting Terror:** As part of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), India must also step up its engagement with the Central Asian countries on fighting terror.
- **Supporting Afghan Defence Forces:** India can support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) where it needs it most: in terms of air power.
- **Engaging with Pakistan:** India's reluctant discussions with the Taliban leadership make little sense unless a less tactical and more strategic engagement with Pakistan is also envisaged.

3. Biden, Kadhimi seal deal to end U.S. combat mission in Iraq

Context:

- U.S. President Joe Biden and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi have sealed an agreement to **end the U.S. combat mission in Iraq by the end of 2021.**

Background:

- **A U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003** based on charges that the then Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's government possessed weapons of mass destruction and subsequently **Saddam Hussein was ousted from power.**
- In recent years, the U.S. mission has focused on helping defeat the **IS militants in Iraq and Syria.** Currently, there are 2,500 U.S. troops in Iraq.

Details:

- Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has been facing increasing pressure from Iran-aligned parties and paramilitary groups who oppose the U.S. military role in the country.

- The U.S. had carried airstrikes against Iran-aligned fighters along Iraq's border with Syria in late June.
- U.S. diplomats and troops in Iraq and Syria were targeted in three rocket and drone attacks earlier this month. Analysts believed the attacks were part of a campaign by Iranian-backed militias.
- Though the U.S. would end its combat mission, American forces will still operate in Iraq in an advisory role. It will continue to train and assist the Iraqi army to deal with the threat posed by ISIS.
- The agreement to end the combat mission in Iraq follows the U.S. decision to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by the end of August. This is being viewed as **part of the U.S.'s larger policy shift to focus on the challenge posed by China**. The **Indo-Pacific strategy** of the U.S. is an indication of the U.S.'s intentions.

4. Exercise Cutlass Express

In news Recently, Indian Naval Ship Talwar participated in a multinational training exercise Cutlass Express 2021, being conducted along the East Coast of Africa.

About 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.
- The 2021 edition of the exercise involves participation of 12 Eastern African countries, US, UK, India and various international organisations like International Maritime Organisation (IMO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Interpol, European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR), Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO).
- The exercise is designed to assess and improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security and increase interoperability between the regional navies.
- India's Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) is also participating in the exercise.
- India's participation is in accordance with India's stated policy towards maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region and vision SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

5. Garib Nawaz Employment Scheme

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.

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.

What are the Other Schemes for Minority Communities?

- 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

6. Needed: an anti-trafficking law

Background:

Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021:

- The Government of India has proposed the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021.

- The Bill aims to tackle all aspects of trafficking including the social and economic causes of the crime, **punishment to traffickers, and the protection and rehabilitation of survivors.**

Concerns related to human trafficking:

- Human trafficking amounts to **gross violation of the human rights** of those trafficked.
- There has been a **rapid increase in trafficking during the pandemic**. The prolonged school closures and loss of family livelihood are being used by the traffickers to increase the human trafficking of thousands of women and children from the poorest sections of our society.
- Apart from being a crime in itself, **human trafficking is also the propeller of several other crimes**. It creates a parallel black economy that fuels **child labour, child marriage, prostitution, bonded labour, forced beggary**, drug-related crimes, corruption, terrorism and other illicit businesses.

Way forward:

- The article written by Nobel Laureate and child rights activist Kailash Satyarthi argues that the economic growth and progress of India would remain meaningless if the scourge of human trafficking is allowed to continue.
- He calls upon the Parliament to urgently pass **a strong anti-trafficking law** to end the menace of human trafficking.
- The article commends the provisions in the proposed Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021, but calls for necessary checks and balances against potential misuse of power by agencies, **periodic reviews of the law, and adequate allocation of resources for effective implementation.**

Additional information:

- Human trafficking is the only offence punishable under the Constitution of India itself, besides the practice of untouchability.
 - **Article 23(1) of the Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits and criminalizes human trafficking.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. Marine Aids to Navigation Bill 2021

In news Parliament has recently passed the Marine Aids to Navigation Bill 2021.

- It aims to replace over 90-year-old Lighthouse Act 1927, to incorporate the global best practices, technological developments and India's International obligations in the field of Marine Aids to Navigation.

What is the Background?

- The administration and management of Lighthouse and Lightships in India is governed by Lighthouse Act 1927 for safe navigation.
- At the time of enactment of Lighthouse Act 1927, there were only 32 Lighthouses in the then British India spread across six regions viz. Aden, Karachi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Rangoon.
- Post-Independence, 17 Lighthouses came under the administrative control of India, which have now increased manifold to meet the growing needs of the shipping industry.
- As the technology evolved, systems were put in place where with the help of Radar and other sensors, vessels were advised from shore about the position and thus Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) came into existence and found wide acceptability.
- These modern, technologically improved aids to marine navigation systems have changed their profile from a 'passive' service to that of 'passive as well as interactive' service.
- Lighthouses have also been globally identified as a major tourist attraction due to scenic location, typical architecture and heritage value.
- The need for enactment of a new Act is necessitated to provide an appropriate statutory framework which reflects the modern role of marine aids to navigation

What are the Benefits of the new Act?

- The new Act will facilitate harmonized and effective functioning of aids to marine navigation and Vessel Traffic Services along the Indian coastline.
- The benefits include:

- **Improved Legal Framework** for Matters related to Aids to Navigation & Vessel Traffic Services and covers the future developments in the field of Marine Navigation.
- **Management of 'Vessel Traffic Services'** for enhancing the safety and efficiency of shipping and to protect environment.
- **Skill development** through Training and Certification for the operators of 'Aids to Navigation' and 'Vessel Traffic Services' at par with International standards.
- **Auditing and Accreditation of Institutes** to cater to the need of Training and Certification at par with global standards.
- Marking of "Wreck" in general waters to identify sunken / stranded vessels for safe and efficient navigation.
- **Development of Lighthouses** for the purpose of education, culture and tourism, which would tap the tourism potential of coastal regions and contribute to their economy.

8. '21.5 mn lost jobs in tourism sector'

- The **tourism industry has been among the hardest hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
 - There has been a significant drop in tourist arrivals (both foreign and domestic) and hence tourism expenditure, during the pandemic.
 - Tourism direct gross value added (TDGVA) has witnessed a high decrease.
 - An estimated 21.5 million people working in the tourism sector lost their jobs during the nine-month period from April 2020-December 2020.

9. Gamma-ray burst

In news A group of astronomers have detected a very short, powerful burst of high-energy radiation that lasted for about a second and had been racing toward Earth for nearly half the present age of the universe.

- The burst detected by NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope on August 26, 2020, turned out to be one the shortest gamma-ray burst (GRB) caused by the death of a massive star.
- From India, The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune (IUCAA), National Centre for Radio Astrophysics – Tata Institute of

Fundamental Research, Pune (NCRA) and IIT Mumbai also participated in this work.

- The burst emitted 14 million times the energy released by the entire Milky Way galaxy over the same amount of time, making it one of the most energetic short-duration GRBs ever seen.

What are gamma-ray bursts (GRB)?

- GRBs are the most powerful events in the universe, detectable across billions of light-years.
- Astronomers classify them as long or short based on whether the event lasts for more or less than two seconds.
- They observe long bursts in association with the demise of massive stars, while short bursts have been linked to a different scenario.
- This recent identification of GRBs showed for the first time that a dying star can produce short bursts too.
- When a star much more massive than the Sun runs out of fuel, its core suddenly collapses and forms a black hole.
- As matter swirls toward the black hole, some of it escapes in the form of two powerful jets that rush outward at almost the speed of light in opposite directions.
- Astronomers only detect a GRB when one of these jets happens to point almost directly toward Earth.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Exercise INDRA-21

Why in News

The **12th Edition of Indo-Russia joint military Exercise INDRA** will be held at **Volgograd, Russia** in August 2021.

Key Points

- **About Exercise INDRA:**
 - The exercise will entail **conduct of counter terror operations** under the **United Nations mandate** by a joint force against international terror groups.
 - The **INDRA series of exercises began in 2003** and was conducted as a bilateral naval exercise alternately between the two countries. However, the **first joint Tri-Services Exercise was conducted in 2017**.
 - The **last joint, tri-services** exercise between India and Russia was conducted in **India in December 2019**. It was held **simultaneously at Babina (near Jhansi), Pune, and Goa**.
- **Significance of Military Exercises:**
 - In the domain of international relations, **military diplomacy** has, in recent years, emerged as a major tool to further diplomatic interests of nations.
 - Participation in international level military exercises is an **indication of the highest level of trust and confidence** between the member nations.
 - On the operational side, **military exercises enable militaries to understand each other's drills** and procedures, overcome language barriers, and facilitate familiarisation with equipment capabilities.
 - This is particularly useful in the event of joint operations whether in war or in **operations other than war (OOTW)** like, humanitarian aid, disaster relief, anti-piracy, etc – when nations come together for a common cause.
 - Perhaps, the most important advantage of joint military exercises is **'strategic signalling'**.
 - A joint exercise with one or more nations serves the purpose of signalling to a third country the influence we have in the region and a demonstration of our resolve to further our diplomatic objectives.
 - On the intangible side, **military exercises promote brotherhood and camaraderie** between soldiers and militaries.
 - Besides goodwill, it is a tool for **projection of a nation's soft power** – culture, language, customs, beliefs, food habits and lifestyle.

2. National Organ Transplant Programme (NOTP)

The Government of India is implementing National Organ Transplant Programme (NOTP) to promote organ donation and transplantation across all States/Union Territories (UTs).

National Organ Transplant Programme (NOTP)

- In 2019, the GoI implemented the NOTP for promoting deceased organ donation.
- Organ donation in India is regulated by the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994.

Types of Organ Donations

- The law allows both deceased and living donors to donate their organs.
- It also identifies brain death as a form of death.
- Living donors must be over 18 years of age and are limited to donating only to their immediate blood relatives or, in some special cases, out of affection and attachment towards the recipient.

(1) Deceased donors:

- They may donate six life-saving organs: kidneys, liver, heart, lungs, pancreas, and intestine.
- Uterus transplant is also performed, but it is not regarded as a life-saving organ.
- Organs and tissues from a person declared legally dead can be donated after consent from the family has been obtained.
- Brainstem death is also recognized as a form of death in India, as in many other countries.
- After a natural cardiac death, organs that can be donated are cornea, bone, skin, and blood vessels, whereas after brainstem death about 37 different organs and tissues can be donated, including the above six life-saving organs

(2) Living donors:

They are permitted to donate the following:

- one of their kidneys
- portion of pancreas
- part of the liver

Features of the NOTP

- Under the NOTP a National Level Tissue Bank (Biomaterial Centre) for storing tissues has been established at National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO), New Delhi.
- Further, under the NOTP, a provision has also been made for providing financial support to the States for setting up of Bio- material centre.
- As of now a Regional Bio-material centre has been established at Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (ROTO), Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

More moves for facilitation: Green Corridors

- Studies have suggested that the chances of transplantation being successful are enhanced by reducing the time delay between harvest and transplant of the organ.
- Therefore, the transportation of the organ is a critical factor. For this purpose, “green corridors” have been created in many parts of India.
- A “green corridor” refers to a route that is cleared out for an ambulance carrying the harvested organs to ensure its delivery at the destination in the shortest time possible.

About NOTTO

National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) is a national level organization set up under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

1. National Human Organ and Tissue Removal and Storage Network
2. National Biomaterial Centre (National Tissue Bank)

[I] National Human Organ and Tissue Removal and Storage Network

- This has been mandated as per the Transplantation of Human Organs (Amendment) Act 2011.
- The network will be established initially for Delhi and gradually expanded to include other States and Regions of the country.
- Thus, this division of the NOTTO is the nodal networking agency for Delhi and shall network for Procurement Allocation and Distribution of Organs and Tissues in Delhi.
- It functions as apex centre for All India activities of coordination and networking for procurement and distribution of Organs and Tissues and registry of Organs and Tissues Donation and Transplantation in the country.

[II] National Biomaterial Centre (National Tissue Bank)

- The Transplantation of Human Organs (Amendment) Act 2011 has included the component of tissue donation and registration of tissue Banks.
- It becomes imperative under the changed circumstances to establish National level Tissue Bank to fulfill the demands of tissue transplantation including activities for procurement, storage and fulfil distribution of biomaterials.
- The main thrust & objective of establishing the centre is to fill up the gap between 'Demand' and 'Supply' as well as 'Quality Assurance' in the availability of various tissues.

The centre will take care of the following Tissue allografts:

1. Bone and bone products
2. Skin graft
3. Cornea
4. Heart valves and vessels

3. PM-CARES Fund should cover COVID orphaned children: SC

The Supreme Court has clarified that welfare schemes such as the PM CARES Fund should cover both children, who became orphans during the Covid-19 pandemic and those, who became orphans due to Covid-19.

What is PM-CARES Fund?

- The **Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund)** was created on 28 March 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
- The fund will be used for combat, containment, and relief efforts against the coronavirus outbreak and similar pandemic-like situations in the future.
- The PM is the chairman of the trust. Members will include the defense, home, and finance ministers.
- The fund will also enable micro-donations. The minimum donation accepted for the PM CARES Fund is 10.
- The donations will be tax-exempt and fall under corporate social responsibility.

Why cover orphaned children?

- Over 75,000 children have been orphaned, abandoned, or have lost a parent during the COVID pandemic.
- It is feared that many of them may become victims of human trafficking rackets or descend into crime.

Under the scrutiny of the court

- The Supreme Court has endorsed the PM CARES Fund as a “public charitable trust” to which donors contribute voluntarily.
- The court said that PM-CARES is “not open” for a PIL petitioner to question the “wisdom” that created the fund in an hour of need.
- The court dismissed the idea that the PM CARES was constituted to “circumvent” the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

4. Pneumonia

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reported that **Pneumonia contributes 16.9% of infant deaths** and it is the **2nd highest cause of infant mortality (after prematurity & low birth weight)**.

- In November 2020, the annual **Pneumonia and Diarrhoea Progress Report** was released by the **International Vaccine Access Centre (IVAC)**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Pneumonia is **an acute respiratory infection of the lungs**. It is also a Pneumococcal disease caused by bacteria called **Streptococcus pneumoniae or pneumococcus**.
- **Cause:**
 - It doesn't have one single cause – it can develop from either **bacteria, viruses or fungi in the air**.
- **Vulnerability:**
 - **Children whose immune systems are immature** (i.e. newborns) or weakened – such as by undernourishment, or diseases like **HIV** – are more vulnerable to pneumonia.

- **Spread:**
 - Pneumonia is **contagious and can be spread through coughing or sneezing**. It can also be spread **through fluids**, like blood during childbirth, or from contaminated surfaces.
- **Vaccine:**
 - Pneumonia caused by bacteria is **easily preventable with vaccines**. 3 doses of the primary vaccine (**Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV)**) to prevent it are recommended.
 - A new vaccine for one of the main viral causes of pneumonia is under development.
 - India has introduced **nationwide rollout of PCV under Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP)**.
- **Diseases Burden:**
 - **Global:** Together, the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Pakistan account for more than half of all deaths** due to pneumonia among children under 5.
 - **Annually, India witnesses an estimated 71% of pneumonia deaths** and 57% of severe pneumonia cases.
- **Initiatives Related to Pneumonia:**
 - **Social Awareness and Action to Neutralise Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS):** The aim is to reduce child mortality due to pneumonia, which contributes to around 15% of deaths of children under the age of five annually.
 - The government aims to **achieve a target of reducing pneumonia deaths among children to less than three per 1,000 live births by 2025**.
 - In 2014, India launched '**Integrated Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (IAPPD)**' to undertake collaborative efforts towards prevention of diarrhoea and Pneumonia related under-five deaths.
 - The **WHO and UNICEF** had launched an integrated **Global Action Plan for Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD)**.

5. South China Sea Dispute

Pentagon chief has said that Beijing's expansive claims in the South China Sea have "no basis in international law", taking aim at China's growing assertiveness in the hotly contested waters.

South China Sea Dispute

- It is a dispute over territory and sovereignty over ocean areas, and the Paracels and the Spratlys – two island chains claimed in whole or in part by a number of countries.
- China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei all have competing claims.
- Alongside the fully-fledged islands, there are dozens of rocky outcrops, atolls, sandbanks, and reefs, such as the Scarborough Shoal.
- China claims by far the largest portion of territory – an area defined by the “nine-dash line” which stretches hundreds of miles south and east from its most southerly province of Hainan.
- Beijing says its right to the area goes back centuries to when the Paracel and Spratly island chains were regarded as integral parts of the Chinese nation, and in 1947 it issued a map detailing its claims.
- It showed the two island groups falling entirely within its territory. Those claims are mirrored by Taiwan.

Spat over Chinese claims

- China has backed its expansive claims with island-building and naval patrols.
- The US says it does not take sides in territorial disputes but has sent military ships and planes near disputed islands, calling them “freedom of navigation” operations to ensure access to key shipping and air routes.
- Both sides have accused each other of “militarizing” the South China Sea.
- There are fears that the area is becoming a flashpoint, with potentially serious global consequences.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. World Economic Outlook: IMF

Why in News

The latest edition of the **International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) World Economic Outlook** has cut its **2021** growth forecast for India to 9.5% from 12.5% estimated earlier in April 2021.

- While re-calibrating its forecast IMF considered two major factors which are **access to vaccines and risk of new Corona-variants**.

Key Points

- **Indian Economy:**
 - Indian economy is expected to grow by **9.5% in 2021** and **8.5% in 2022** (larger than the **6.9% it had projected in April**).
 - In 2020, India's economy witnessed an estimated **contraction of 8%**.
 - The IMF has cut its growth forecast because of the **Covid-19 Second Wave** that hit the recovery momentum, damaging consumer confidence and rural demand.
- **Global Economy:**
 - Retained its global growth forecast at **6% for the year 2021**, and it is expected to grow at **4.9% for the year 2022**.
 - In 2020, the global economy **contracted by 3.3%**
- **Global Trade Volume:**
 - Revised up its predictions of global trade volume growth by a sharp 130 bps **for 2021 to 9.7%** and **50 bps for 2022 to 7%**.
 - **India is set to benefit** from an expected rise in global trade prospects once its supply side gains traction.
- **Suggestions:**
 - **Tighter External Financial Conditions:**
 - Emerging markets **should prepare for possibly tighter external financial conditions by lengthening debt maturities** where possible and limiting the buildup of unhedged foreign currency debt.
 - **Avoid Premature Tightening Policies:**
 - Central banks should avoid premature tightening policies when faced with **transitory inflation pressures** but should be prepared to move quickly if inflation expectations show **signs of de-anchoring**.
 - **Prioritize Health Spending:**
 - Fiscal policy **should continue to prioritize health spending**, including on vaccine production and distribution infrastructure, personnel, and public health campaigns, to boost take-up.
 - **Fiscal policy** is the means by which a government adjusts its spending levels and tax rates to monitor and influence a nation's economy.

International Monetary Fund

- The IMF was set up along with the **World Bank** after the **Second World War** to assist in the reconstruction of war-ravaged countries.
 - The two organisations were agreed to be set up at a conference in Bretton Woods in the US. Hence, they are **known as the Bretton Woods twins**.
- **Created in 1945, the IMF is governed by and accountable to the 189 countries** that make up its near-global membership. India joined on **27th December, 1945**.
- The IMF's primary purpose is **to ensure the stability of the international monetary system** – the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries (and their citizens) to transact with each other.
 - The Fund's **mandate was updated in 2012** to include all macroeconomic and financial sector issues that bear on global stability.
- **Reports by IMF:**
 - **Global Financial Stability Report.**
 - **World Economic Outlook.**
- **World Economic Outlook**
 - It is a survey by the **IMF that is usually published twice a year** in the months of April and October.
 - It analyzes and predicts **global economic developments during the near and medium term**.
 - In response to the growing demand for more frequent forecast updates, the **WEO Update is published in January and July** between the two main WEO publications released usually **in April and October**.

7. Nauka Module of Russia

Why in News

Recently, the **Russian Space Agency Roscosmos, launched its biggest space laboratory named Nauka to the International Space Station (ISS).**

- Earlier, **four astronauts were launched to the ISS from Florida as part of a collaboration between NASA and SpaceX** under the Commercial Crew Program. The mission is called **Crew-2**.

International Space Station

- ISS is a habitable artificial satellite - the **single largest man-made structure in low earth orbit**.

- It is a collaborative effort between **five participating space agencies: NASA** (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), **Roscosmos (Russia)**, **JAXA (Japan)**, **ESA (Europe)** and **CSA (Canada)**.
- 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.

Other Space Stations

- **China** has launched an unmanned module "**Tianhe**" of its permanent space station that it plans to complete by the end of 2022.
- **India** is also planning to launch its **own space station by 2030**, joining the league of US, Russia, and China to an elite space club.

Key Points

- **About Nauka Module:**
 - Nauka **means Science** in Russian. This is **Russia's most ambitious research facility in space** and is fitted with an oxygen generator, robotic cargo crane, a toilet and a bed for Russian astronauts.
 - This was **sent into orbit using a Proton rocket** (family of rockets in Russia - the most powerful in Russia's space inventory) and will **take eight days to reach the ISS**.
 - During this period, engineers and flight controllers will test Nauka in space, and prepare for its arrival on the space station.
 - It will **replace Pirs**, and **will be attached to the critical Zvezda module**, which provides all of the space station's life support systems and serves as the structural and functional centre of the Russian Orbital Segment (ROS).
 - **Pirs** has been part of the space station since September 2001, functioning as a docking port for Russian visiting spacecraft and an airlock for Russian spacewalks.
- **Significance:**
 - It will **increase the habitable volume of the ISS to 70 cubic Metres**. Cosmonauts will use the extra space to conduct experiments and to store cargo.
 - Nauka will serve as a **new science facility, docking port, and spacewalk airlock for future operations**.
 - For more than 20 years, people **have been carrying out research under microgravity conditions** which is not possible on earth, this module will help augment the ongoing research.

- Research is being carried out in various disciplines such as, biology, human physiology, and physical, material and space science.

8. Theatre Command under Chief of Defence Staff is not a good idea

Context

The government is reportedly planning to re-organise the military into a theatre command under the chief of defence staff (CDS) in which the assets of the Air Force will be split into four and distributed among four operational theatres.

Background of the creation of CDS

- In 2012, the **Naresh Chandra Committee** suggested the creation of a CDS, which would take on overall functions of the chairman, chiefs of committee as well as the responsibilities pertaining to **centralised planning, induction, training, intelligence and logistics**.
- Operations, according to the committee's suggestion, would continue to be managed by the respective chiefs of staff.
- However, sometime in 2016-17, this idea was modified to **organise the operational assets of the three services into four theatre commands**, all of which are now proposed to be brought under the CDS.

Issues with creating theatre command by dividing Air Force

- **Professional leadership is critical in support elements:** The Air Chief's professional leadership of the Air Force is crucial to orchestrate a variety of support elements like aerial tankers, AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems), AEW, Heliborne support and UAVs in an "offensive operation".
- **Lack of in-dept understanding:** A land theatre command, if given power over the air elements, may not have the confidence to launch such a mission because of the **lack of in-depth understanding** of the organisational complexity and the risks involved.
- **Dilution of assets may harm effectiveness:** Dilution of the combat assets of the Air Force, a 30-squadron force consisting of five or six types of aircraft, might severely affect mission-effectiveness.
- **Role of CDS:** It is extremely doubtful if the CDS can cope with the enhanced responsibilities that include operations, albeit through the theatre commanders.

- That would leave only training, maintenance, and support under the chiefs of staff – a gross **under-utilisation of the operational leadership** built over 40 years.
- **Resource limitations:** Forming a separate air defence command for the air defence of the entire nation seems an impractical idea considering our **resource limitations**.
- **Current arrangement functioned effortlessly:** The current arrangement of a decentralised air defence organisation managed by Air Force geographical commands has **functioned faultlessly**.
- **Flexibility:** The existing structures afford **better flexibility**.
- There will be **significant expenditure** to construct the operational infrastructure of the theatre commands.
- **Timing:** We are trying to effect changes at a time the military is deployed actively.
- The Chinese have dug in hard, and we do not yet know their strategy.
- To divide the Air Force into four units at this moment is inadvisable.

Way forward

- **White paper:** There is **no white paper** on the advantages of the theatre commands or one listing the merits of the CDS donning the mantle of the operational head of the entire military operation.
- So, a white paper on these aspects could clear the air over the utilities of such moves.
- **Joint planning is a must**, but operations are best undertaken by individual services who know what other services are doing and when.

Conclusion

Splitting the asset of the Air Force would result in dilution of its power and is not advisable at the current juncture.

9. Unlocking recovery

Context

Many developed countries are poised for strong growth. This will compel their respective central banks to begin normalising the extremely loose monetary policies. This will require a reorientation of India's stimulus strategy.

Global growth momentum

- On the global front, the growth momentum has been strong, particularly in the US and China, although recent data suggest this has peaked or is even stalling.
- Post the perceived hawkishness of the last US Federal Reserve policy meeting, the traded interest rate of the benchmark US 10-year treasury bond fell to below 1.3 per cent.
- The falling rate reflects disquiet about the durability of the recovery once the fiscal stimulus starts waning.
- China recently announced a 0.5 per cent cut in the required reserves ratio for banks.
- Europe's recovery had begun to inch up, but members of the European Central Bank have begun to push back on market expectations of early tapering.
- However, some smaller global central banks have started normalising their respective **Quantitative Easing** programmes.

Growth momentum in India

- The encouraging aspect of the recovery is **the resilience of many mid- and large-turnover companies** in the face of the debilitating public health crisis
- In India, there are signs that the recovery momentum began to strengthen from mid-June, and of **demand accelerating**, despite **capacity utilisation** in many industries below thresholds needed for the next round of private investments.
- In line with the market consensus, we think that 2021-22 growth is likely to be in the 9-10 per cent range.
- **Tax collections**, another indicator of activity, even if a bit skewed, support this view.
- A revival of **retail consumer demand** is critical for sustaining the recovery. Reports from industry associations suggest a somewhat mixed picture.
- Demand emanating from rural geographies is important for sustaining recovery.
- Demand for work under MGNREGA suggests continuing stress.
- Monsoons will be a big contributor.
- Sowing of kharif crops stalled in late June, but is predicted to pick up again in mid-July.
- Renewed **government intervention** is required.

Factors deciding the trajectory of recovery

- **Inflation:** Rising inflation could force a monetary policy normalisation faster than presently anticipated.
- **Global recovery:** Effects global central banks' policy tightening will only add to the difficulty of balancing a policy-induced increase in interest rates, moderating financial markets volatility and **maintaining growth incentives**.
- **Access to credit:** Access to credit remains a crucial input in the recovery matrix, particularly for small and micro enterprises.
- The Union government's **Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)** has reportedly been very effective in stabilising the solvency (and cash flows) of micro and small businesses.

Way forward

- **Expansion of subvention scheme:** The expansion of subvention (ECLGS) is probably the most effective template to incentivise credit flows, leveraging on the government's balance sheet to take on the first loss risks.
- At the same time, capex proposals of the Centre and states should gradually draw in private sector capex.
- **Policy intervention to create a level field:** Corporate health has improved, with lower debt on balance sheets.
- Adoption of technology is widespread; this **will boost productivity and competitiveness**.
- But these factors reinforce trends in consolidation and market power.
- It will require policy interventions to create **a more level playing field for smaller companies**, which is crucial for job creation.

Conclusion

Policy support will thus need to adapt from the "revive" to the "thrive" phase, to place India on a sustained 7 per cent plus growth path.

10. Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 will be introduced and is likely to be pushed for passage in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament.

- Electricity distribution is at the cutting edge of the power sector.

- Despite the last 25 years of power sector reforms, the electricity distribution companies are unable to pay the generation and transmission companies as well as banks / financial institutions due to poor financial health.
- In this situation, patchwork may not turn around the power sector and a holistic approach is the need of the hour.
- The provisions of the proposed amendment bill have to be seen in this context.

Key features of Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

De-licensing: Electricity distribution is delicensed, at least in the letter, giving consumers a choice to choose a distribution company in their area.

Universal service obligation: There is the provision of a universal service obligation fund, which shall be managed by a government company. This fund shall be utilized to meet any deficits in cross-subsidy. In case of supply through pre-paid meters, security deposit will not be required.

Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (APTEL): It is being strengthened by an increasing number of members. The domains from where the chairperson and members of Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) and State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERC) will come have been described.

Renewable Power Obligation: Keeping in view the national climate change goals, the responsibility of fixing renewable power obligations (RPO) is shifted from state commissions to the central government.

Penalty: Penalty for contravention of the provisions of the Act has been increased up to Rs 1 crore. Non-fulfillment of RPO will attract stringent penalties as per the proposed amendments.

Important issues not addressed

- **Recovery of dues:** Discoms collect revenue from the consumers and feed the supply chain upstream. They are, however, unable to recover their costs, out of which nearly 75-80 percent are power purchase costs.
- **Tariff:** A broad guideline to reduce tariffs could have been part of the proposed amendment bill. Recently, the Forum of Regulators came out with a report on cost elements of tariff and suggested measures to reduce the same.
- **AT&C losses:** The Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses of 12 states were more than 25 percent and of six states between 15 and 25 percent, according to a report released by the distribution utility forum based on Uday dashboard in 2020.

Some provisions may backfire

- Power distribution is proposed to be delicensed. However, the eligibility criteria shall be prescribed by the central government and the conditions for registration by the SERC.
- There is a provision for amendment and cancellation of registration as well. In case these provisions are implemented similar to a license, the purpose shall be defeated.
- The newly registered companies are given the facility to use the power allocation as well as the network of existing discom, which may be dilapidated in many cases due to paucity of funds.
- With such a network, the quality of supply to the electricity consumers will be seriously affected.
- Financial penalty on discom may not fully compensate and satisfy the consumers in such cases.

Some of the issues that may be considered for holistic power sector reforms:

- The provision of coal and railway freight regulators
- Linkage of AT&C losses as key performance indicator for release of central funds to states by any ministry
- Provision of a risk management committee and corporate governance within discoms, irrespective of being listed company

Way forward

- Fourteen years after the last amendment to the Electricity Act, currently, the focus of the amendment is on competition and compliance.
- Electricity regulatory commissions hold the key to take this forward.
- The commissions should be built as strong institutions and their autonomy should be respected and maintained.
- After providing a robust framework for fair competition, the government should minimize its frequent interventions in the sector.
- The government interventions often distort the market and maybe resorted to only in case of market failure.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Arrange the following States in descending order based on resources of gold ore (primary):

1. Bihar
2. Rajasthan
3. Karnataka
4. West Bengal

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : a

- As per National Mineral Inventory data, the total reserves/resources of gold ore (primary) in the country have been estimated at 501.83 million tonnes.
- In India, largest resources of gold ore (primary) are located in Bihar (44%) followed by Rajasthan (25%), Karnataka (21%), West Bengal (3%), Andhra Pradesh (3%), Jharkhand (2%).
- The remaining 2% resources of ore are located in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

2. With reference to Monkeypox consider the following statements:

1. It is a viral zoonotic disease.
2. Monkeys are the only natural host of the virus.
3. Infected people break out in a rash that looks a lot like chickenpox.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

D 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer : C

Explanation

Monkeypox Virus

- It is a **viral zoonotic disease** (transmission from animals to humans) and is identified as a pox-like disease among monkeys. Hence it is named Monkeypox. It is endemic to Nigeria. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - It is caused by the monkeypox virus, a member of the **Orthopoxvirus genus** in the family Poxviridae.
- The **natural host of the virus remains undefined**. But the disease has been reported in many animals.
 - Animals known to be sources of the Monkeypox virus include monkeys and apes, a variety of rodents (including rats, mice, squirrels and prairie dogs) and rabbits. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- Monkeypox infected people **break out in a rash that looks a lot like chickenpox**. But the fever, malaise, and headache from Monkeypox are usually more severe than in chickenpox infection.
 - In the early stage of the disease, Monkeypox can be distinguished from smallpox because the lymph gland gets enlarged. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

3. Consider the following statements with respect to Gross Environment Product (GEP)

1. It reflects the aggregated annual value of goods and services provided by ecosystems to people in a given region.
2. Karnataka is the first state in India to introduce Gross Environment Product (GEP).

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

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

Answer : b

- The Uttarakhand government announced that it will initiate valuation of its natural resources in the form of 'Gross Environment Product' (GEP), said to be along the lines of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- **Uttarakhand** is the first State in India to introduce the Gross Environment Product (GEP).

Gross Environment Product (GEP)

- Gross Environment Product (GEP) is an assessment system to measure the ecosystem services of any area.
- It reflects the aggregated annual value of goods and services provided by ecosystems (forests, water bodies, oceans, etc.) to people in a given region, such as at district levels, state, and country.
- It entails the establishment of a natural capital accounting framework by integrating ecological benefits into common measures of economic growth such as GDP.
- It summarizes the value of ecosystem services in a single monetary metric.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme

1. It aims to improve the quality of technical education system in India.
2. It is a project implemented by the Ministry of Education in association with World Bank.

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

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

Answer : c

- *The World Bank-supported Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) Phase-III - started by the Ministry of Education in 2017 - is going to conclude on 30th September 2021.*

Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme-III

- TEQIP Phase-III aims to improve the quality of engineering education.

- Rs 10 crore has been provided for Multidisciplinary Education Research Improvement in Technical Education (MERITE) in the budget 2021-22 to start preparatory works.

The measures under TEQIP Phase-III include,

1. **Institution-based** - Accreditation of the courses through NBA, governance reforms, improving the processes, digital initiatives, securing autonomy for the colleges.
 2. **Student-based** - Improving the quality of teaching, teacher training, equipping the class rooms, revision of syllabus, etc.,
- The focus is on the most backward states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, North-East, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, etc.
 - The Government of India has been making continuous efforts to ensure that the focus State Governments prepare a sustainability plan for the TEQIP-III to avoid any academic standstill beyond the project period.

5. Which of the following explanations are correct for Gatekeeper Model?

- a. It is developed to block malicious software
- b. It is proposed to avoid strikes in public companies
- c. It aims to prevent suicides in Prison
- d. It is used by farmers to prevent Human-Wild animal conflict

Answer : c

Gatekeeper Model

- National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) issued guidelines on the management of mental health issues of the prisoners and prison staff.
- It recommended the gatekeeper model where selected inmates trained to identify prisoners at risk of suicide, would refer them to treatment or supportive service.

6. Kakatiya Ramappa Temple is located in which of the following states?

- a. Andhra Pradesh
- b. Karnataka

- c. Maharashtra
- d. Telangana

Answer : d

Kakatiya Ramappa Temple

- It was built during the rule of Kakatiya dynasty, located in the State of Telangana, declared as UNESCO's World Heritage site.
- It is the main Shiva temple in a walled complex built during the Kakatiyan period (1123–1323 CE) under rulers Rudradeva and Recharla Rudra.
- Its sculptures of high artistic quality illustrate regional dance customs and Kakatiyan culture.
- It is nominated under UNESCO's Criterion i (Masterpiece of human creative genius) and Criterion iii (bearing a unique or at least an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition, which is living or which has disappeared).

Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss how far Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) has been useful for our environment as well as society? (250 words)

Approach

- Write a few introductory lines about the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA).
- Discuss the importance of EIA for the environment as well as society.
- Discuss the shortcomings of the EIA process.
- Provide solutions to remove such shortcomings.
- Conclude suitably.

2. The US seeks to formalise ties with countries of the Indo-Pacific region similar to something like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with an aim to counter China. Discuss the prospects and challenges for India to become a regional power. (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce with a few lines on the US intention to form a NATO like organisation in Indo-Pacific region.
- Discuss the prospect and challenges of India becoming a regional power considering the growing influence of the USA in South Asia.
- Provide a way forward that India should seek.
- Conclude suitably on a positive note.

