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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. J&K administration bans drones in Srinagar

What's in News?

The Jammu and Kashmir administration **banned the sale, use and possession of unmanned aerial vehicles in Srinagar.**

Background:

- Recently, two Indian Air Force personnel were injured in a drone attack on the Air Force Station in Jammu.
 - Two explosives-laden drones had crashed into the airbase.
 - Suspicious sightings of UAVs **triggered a security alert.**

Details:

- The order was **issued under Section 144 of the CrPC.** Violation of the guidelines would **attract punitive action.**
- The government departments are allowed to use drones for mapping, surveys and surveillance in agricultural, environment conservation and disaster mitigation sectors.

2. Assam woman gets bail in sedition case

What's in News?

An Assam woman was **booked for sedition** for having lunch on a tablecloth resembling the Indian flag.

- She was also charged under the **Prevention to Insults of National Honour Act, 1971.**

Note:

- The display of the National Flag is governed by the provisions of two acts viz. **Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950** and **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.**
- Further, the government issues non-statutory instructions from time to time.

- The Flag Code of India serves as a single reference point about how to properly hoist the flag of India with due honour.
- **The Flag Code of India itself is not an act of parliament.** It is a set of laws, practices and conventions that apply to the display of the national flag of India.

Sedition:

- Section 124A, IPC states: “Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law in India, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, to which a fine may be added; or, with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which a fine may be added; or, with fine.”
- According to the law, **disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.** However, disapprobation (criticism) of the **measures or administrative action** of the government to obtain their alteration by **lawful means is not an offence.**
- It is classified as “**cognisable**” and “**non-bailable**” – the accused cannot get bail as a matter of right, but is subject to the **discretion of the session’s judge.**

3. The problem now with the military synergy plan

Context:

- In the light of the ongoing deliberations of the **high-level committee for consultations on the creation of integrated tri-service theatre commands**, the article suggests a few recommendations in that direction.

Details:

- The aim of the proposed integrated theatre commands is to bring about jointness and synergy in operations among the different military forces which would **increase the effectiveness of the forces** even while **reducing the cost of their operations** through the elimination of duplication and wasteful practices or processes.

Recommendations:

National security strategy:

- The article argues that it is first essential to have a national security strategy.

- A **well-defined national security strategy** can help come up with appropriate military strategies, doctrines and required capabilities. That would help define the structures required for the conduct of synergised operations with the requisite communications and training requirements in the proposed integrated theatre commands.

Deliberations on the structure:

- The structure and functioning of the proposed integrated theatre commands should be finalized after **adequate deliberations and discussions with all stakeholders**. This will iron out any differences upfront and produce an effective, integrated theatre command.
- Thus **consultative strategizing is a prerequisite before a concrete structure is put in place**.

Joint planning:

- **Joint planning and training with war-gaming** should be prioritized. This will help the forces figure out the required structures with suitable command, control and communications for a future integrated theatre command.

Institutionalised structure:

- Integrated theatre commands require an **institutionalized higher defence organisation**, like the erstwhile Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC).
- This will help ensure **regular dialogue between the political and military leadership**, thus helping avoid knee-jerk responses during crises.

4. Taliban capture several districts in Afghanistan

What's in News?

Taliban captured several districts in Badakhshan province – Northeastern part of Afghanistan.

- The fall of the Panjwai district in the southern province of Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, comes just two days after **the U.S. and NATO forces vacated their main Bagram Air Base near Kabul**.
- As the U.S plans to **withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021**, the **Taliban have made strides throughout the country**.
 - Their most significant gains have been in the **northern half of Afghanistan** (a traditional stronghold of the U.S.-allied warlords who helped defeat the Taliban in 2001).

- The Taliban now control roughly a third of all 421 districts and district centres in Afghanistan.

5. How Chhattisgarh has stalled a historic judgment

Salwa Judum:

- Salwa Judum was a militia that was mobilized and **deployed as part of anti-insurgency operations in Chhattisgarh**, aimed at countering Naxalite violence in the region.
- The militia, **consisting of local tribal youth**, received support and training from the Chhattisgarh state government.

Nandini Sundar & Ors vs State Of Chattisgarh (2011):

- In 2011, the Supreme Court of India declared **Salwa Judum to be illegal and unconstitutional**, and ordered its disbanding. The Court directed the Chhattisgarh government to recover all the firearms, ammunition and accessories.
- The use of surrendered Maoists and untrained villagers and youth in frontline counter-insurgency operations was criticised for its violations of human rights and **declared as a violation of Article 14 and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**.
- **Article 14- Equality before law.** The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India; Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- **Article 21 - Protection of life and personal liberty.** No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

Context:

- 10th anniversary of the Salwa Judum case.

6. Four years on, delay derails Railways' CCTV project

What's in News?

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the **Indian Railways and RailTel** for the **installation of surveillance cameras at 983 stations across the country**. The project has been **inordinately delayed** and investigation has revealed irregularities in the tendering process.

- The MoU signed four years ago was envisaged under the “Nirbhaya Fund” to enhance the safety of women passengers.
- As part of the scheme, RailTel was allotted the execution of Video Surveillance Systems at 983 railway stations across the country at an estimated cost of ₹500 crore.
 - It was described as one of the largest projects of its kind, involving the integration of Indian Railways and RailTel systems, with the collaboration of multiple agencies.

Nirbhaya Fund:

- The Nirbhaya Fund was **created by the Union government after the brutal gang-rape and murder** of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi in 2012.
- The dedicated fund was meant for projects specifically designed for the **safety and security of women.**

7. OFB workers slam ‘draconian’ Ordinance

What’s in News?

The Union cabinet recently approved a plan to **split OFB into seven corporate entities.**

- **Employees of the Ordnance Factory Board are against the corporatization of the organisation.**

Details:

- OFB which has 41 factories will be **corporatised into seven fully government-owned corporate entities** on the lines of Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU).
- Once implemented, **the OFB, the establishment of which was accepted by the British in 1775, will cease to exist.**
- Currently, the **OFB headquartered in Kolkata functions as a department under the Department of Defence Production.**
- The restructuring is aimed at **transforming the ordnance factories into productive and profitable assets, deepening specialisation in the product range, enhancing competitiveness, improving quality and achieving cost efficiency.**
- This move would allow these companies **autonomy, as well as help improve accountability and efficiency.**

Ordnance Factory Board:

- OFB is a **government agency** that is **controlled by the department of defence production (DDP)** under the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- It is **involved in research, development and production** in the areas of **air, land and sea**.
- It is also **involved in testing and logistics**. OFB comprised 41 ordnance factories and 9 training institutes.
- It is called the **“Fourth Arm of Defence”** and also the **“Force Behind the Armed Forces”** of India.
- OFB is the **35th largest defence equipment manufacturer in the world**, 2nd largest in Asia, and the largest in India.

8. Mixed bag

Context:

- Data on **India’s merchandise exports** for the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

Details:

- India reported its **highest-ever merchandise exports at \$ 95 billion in the first quarter** of the current fiscal, 85 per cent higher than exports registered in the year-ago period.
- The fact that these increased exports were observed during a quarter when the second wave of the pandemic hit its peak, and there were varying degrees of lockdowns in states, makes it all the more noteworthy.
- Propelling the surge in exports were **non-rice cereals, iron ore, organic and inorganic chemicals, engineering goods exports**. Also, the agriculture-based rice and rose sectors have also witnessed rapid export growth.

Reasons for the increase:

- The merchandise exports have been driven by **robust demand in the external markets**. The rising vaccination coverage and economic recovery in key developed markets including the EU and the U.S. have bolstered demand.
- Also, the **exponential rise in commodity prices**, attributable to the reopening of major economies, as well as an increased appetite for raw materials and grains in China, has been a key contributor to the increased export growth.

Concerns:

- The article warns that despite the impressive performance on the export front, the Indian export sector continues to face the following concerns.

Structural issues in key sectors:

- The crucial job-generating export sectors including readymade garments, leather and leather products and tea have posted double-digit declines from June 2019 levels, reflecting the deeper structural problems in these sectors.
 - The **inadequate product variety, lack of market awareness among the producers** and sharp competition from other producing countries like Sri Lanka have resulted in decreased tea exports from India.
 - Short-sighted policy measures, **WTO mandated withdrawal of export incentives and a pandemic-induced slowdown** in orders has adversely impacted the export of leather goods from India.
 - The recent imposition of **import duty on cotton** does not augur well for India's ambition to emerge as a key source of cheap and quality cotton clothes.

Logistics challenges:

- A **container shortage and heightened congestion** have resulted in a rapid increase in freight rates out of Indian ports. This will lead to an increase in Indian goods and thus **adversely impact the price competitiveness of Indian goods in the price-sensitive international markets.**

Delay in implementation of announced policies:

- The central government had previously announced the **RoDTEP Scheme** in the light of the US challenging India's key export subsidy schemes in the WTO (World Trade Organisation) and the dispute panel in WTO ruling against India.
 - **RoDTEP stands for Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products.** It is a new scheme that is applicable with effect from January 1st, 2021, formed to replace the existing MEIS (Merchandise Exports from India Scheme). The scheme will ensure that the **exporters receive refunds on the embedded taxes and duties** previously non-recoverable.
- The RoDTEP Scheme was envisaged to help exporters from India even while ensuring that **India stays WTO-compliant.**
- The Government has so far **not notified the rates applicable under the RoDTEP scheme.** This has led to a scenario wherein exporters are still unsure of how to price their products while bidding for orders. This has led to **lower participation of Indian exporters in international biddings.**

Government target:

- The Trade Minister has announced that the government will make a concerted effort to achieve the **target of \$400 billion merchandise exports in FY22**. To achieve this, the government would be setting targets for sectors and countries.
 - India's highest exports in any year were \$330 billion in FY19.
- The government has set a **merchandise exports target of \$500 billion for FY23 and \$1 trillion in the next five years**.

Recommendations:

- Policymakers need to take appropriate measures to **restore the health of every constituent sector** if economically enduring long-term growth in exports is to be ensured.
- As acknowledged by the government, there is the need to **simplify the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) rules**. Allowing SEZs to do business with domestic tariff area, will help remove the disadvantages that industries in the domestic tariff area face. This will provide a much-needed impetus to exports from India.
- **District wise export promotion plans** should be prepared and implemented with relevant support to potential exporters.
- Relevant sector-wise and country-wise **export promotion councils** must be set up to help increase the exports.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

9. Chinese astronauts complete first spacewalk at new station

Context:

Chinese astronauts successfully performed the country's first tandem spacewalk outside the new Tiangong station in orbit around the Earth.

- The **Shenzhou-12 spaceship** carried the three astronauts to Tianhe.
 - **Tianhe is the main module** of the first permanent space station by China.
- This is a major step in China's plans to have a **fully functioning space station by 2022**.
- China's first space station called Tiangong is set to be functional by the end of 2022 and is the second space station only after the International Space Station.
- The space station China is building is called **Tiangong which means "Heavenly Space"**.

10. IB sounds alert on Bangladeshi nationals

Context:

Eight Bangladeshi nationals **arrested in Andhra Pradesh with fake documents** have admitted that several of their countrymen had entered Indian territory along with them.

Details:

- Investigation officers suspect that **many Bangladeshis are secretly staying in Kolkata, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Goa and other cities.**

Issue:

- **Due to poverty**, many Bangladeshis are entering India illegally by road **in search of work.**
- India has been witnessing immigration since independence. However, illegal migration is the most contentious issue because:
 - There are no authentic official statistics to ascertain the actual number of illegal migrants.
 - Many such Bangladeshis are **lured by terrorists** and are **helping banned organisations in creating unrest in India.**
- Illegal immigration from Bangladesh into Assam has also had serious **socio-political implications.**
- **India's borders with Bangladesh being porous** pose a challenge to its effective management.

Note:

- India **does not currently have a national law on refugees.**

Geneva Convention (1951)

- The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the Geneva Convention (1951) is a United Nations multilateral treaty that **defines who a refugee is, and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum.**
- **India is not a signatory** of the UN Refugee Convention, 1951 and the protocol of 1967.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. UDISE+ 2019-20 Report

Why in News

Recently, the Union Education Minister released the **Report on United Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20** for School Education in India.

United Information System for Education Plus

- It is **one of the largest Management Information Systems on school education**. It was launched in 2018-2019 to speed up data entry, reduce errors, improve data quality and ease its verification.
- It is **an application to collect the school details** about factors related to a school and its resources.
 - It is an **updated and improved version of UDISE, which was initiated in 2012-13** by the Ministry of Education.
- It covers **more than 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million teachers and 250 million children**.
- It helps **measure the education parameters from classes 1 to 12** in government and private schools across India.

Key Points

- **Total Students:**
 - In 2019-20, total students in school education from **pre-primary to higher secondary have crossed 26.45 crore**. This is **higher by 42.3 lakh** compared to 2018-19.
- **Gross Enrolment Ratio:**
 - **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** at all levels of school education has **improved in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19**.
 - **Upper Primary Level** increased to **89.7%** from 87.7%.
 - **Elementary Level** increased to **97.8%** from 96.1%.
 - **Secondary Level** increased to **77.9%** from 76.9%.
 - **Higher Secondary Level** increased to **51.4%** from 50.1%.
 - **GER is the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population** corresponding to the same level of education.
- **Pupil Teacher Ratio:**

- In 2019-20, **96.87 lakh teachers** were engaged in school education. This is **higher by about 2.57 lakh compared to 2018-19**.
- The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) has **improved at all levels of school education**.
- **Enrolment of Divyang Students:**
 - Enrolment of Divyang students has **increased by 6.52% over 2018-19**.
- **Enrolment of Girls:**
 - In 2019-20, **enrolment of girls from primary to higher secondary is more than 12.08 crore**. This is an increase by 14.08 lakh compared to 2018-19.
- **Gender Parity Index:**
 - Between 2012-13 and 2019-20, the **Gender Parity Index (GPI)** at both **Secondary and Higher Secondary levels have improved**.
 - **GPI in primary, secondary and tertiary education is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education to the number of male students in each level**.
 - Improvement of GPI has been **most pronounced at the higher secondary level**, which has gone up to 1.04 in 2019-20 from 0.97 in 2012-13.
- **Facilities at Schools:**
 - **Electricity:** More than **80% of schools in India in 2019-20 had functional electricity**. This is an improvement of more than 6% over the previous year 2018-19.
 - **Computers:** The number of schools having functional computers **increased to 5.2 lakh in 2019-20 from 4.7 lakh in 2018-19**.
 - **Internet:** The number of schools having internet facilities **increased to 3.36 lakh in 2019-20 from 2.9 lakh in 2018-19**.
 - **Hand Wash Facility:** More than **90% of schools in India had hand wash facilities in 2019-20**. This is a major improvement as this percentage was only 36.3% in 2012-13.
 - **Medical Check-Ups:** More than **82% of schools conducted medical check-ups of students in 2019-20**, an increase of more than 4% compared to the previous year 2018-19.
- **Some Important Government Initiatives:**
 - **New National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**.
 - **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**.
 - **Mid Day Meal Scheme**.
 - **Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009**.
 - **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**.

2. Anti-Methanogenic Feed Supplement: Harit Dhara

Why in News

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed an **anti-methanogenic feed** supplement '**Harit Dhara**' (HD), which can cut down cattle methane emissions by 17-20% and can also result in higher milk production.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - HD decreases the population of protozoa microbes in the rumen, responsible for hydrogen production and making it available to the archaea (structure similar to bacteria) for reduction of CO₂ to methane.
 - It has been **made from tannin-rich plant-based sources**. Tropical plants containing **tannins, bitter and astringent chemical compounds**, are known to suppress or remove protozoa from the rumen.
 - Fermentation after using HD will help produce **more propionic acid**, which provides more energy for **lactose (milk sugar) production** and **body weight gain**.
 - This leads to **economic benefits for farmers**.
- **Methane Production in Cattle:**
 - **Rumen, the first of the four stomachs** where they eat plant material, cellulose, fibre, starch and sugars. These get fermented or broken down by microorganisms prior to further digestion and nutrient absorption.
 - Carbohydrate fermentation leads to production of CO₂ and hydrogen. These are used by microbes (Archaea) present in the rumen to produce methane.
- **Methane Emissions from Cattle:**
 - Belching cattle, buffaloes, sheep and goats in India **emit an estimated 9.25 million tonnes (mt) to 14.2 mt of methane annually**, out of a global total of 90 mt-plus from livestock.
 - The **2019 Livestock Census** showed India's cattle population at 193.46 million, along with 109.85 million buffaloes, 148.88 million goats and 74.26 million sheep.
 - Being **largely fed on agricultural residues** – wheat/paddy straw and maize, sorghum or bajra stover – **ruminants in India tend to produce 50-100% higher methane than their industrialised country counterparts** that are given more easily fermentable/digestible concentrates, silages and green fodder.
 - **Methane's global warming potential** – 25 times of carbon dioxide (CO₂) over 100 years, makes it a more potent greenhouse gas.
- **Government Initiatives related to Livestock:**

- **Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF):** It was set up to support private investment in Dairy Processing, value addition and cattle feed infrastructure.
- **Rashtriya Gokul Mission:** It is aimed at developing and conserving indigenous breeds of bovine population, also to enhance milk production and to make it more remunerative to the farmers.
- **National Livestock Mission:** It was launched in the year 2014-15 to ensure quantitative and qualitative improvement in livestock production systems and capacity building of all stakeholders.
- **National Artificial Insemination Programme:** It was started to prevent the spread of certain diseases which are genital in nature, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the breed.

3. Punjab Suba Movement

Why in News

Recently, the **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)** commemorated the first entry of a police force inside the **Golden Temple** on **4th July, 1955** during the **Punjab Suba movement (Morcha)**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It **started in Punjab soon after Independence**. Shiromani Akali Dal (Political Party) was leading the movement for a **Punjabi speaking state**.
 - However, **there was also opposition to this idea**.
 - Those in favour of the demand used to raise the slogan **Punjabi Suba Amar Rahe** and those opposing the demand were raising slogans in favour of **'Maha-Punjab'**.
 - It was in April, 1955 that the government **banned the slogans fearing law and order problems under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**.
 - The demand for creation of Punjabi Suba **automatically gave basis to the demand for having a separate state of Haryana**.
- **Demand of the Movement:**
 - A Punjabi speaking state which will have **Punjabi speaking areas' population**.
 - There should be **no attempt to temper for increasing or decreasing its size artificially**. The Punjabi speaking state **will be under the Indian Constitution**.
- **Formation of Punjab:**

- With the passage of the **Punjab Reorganization Act 1966** (and in accordance with the earlier recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission), **Haryana was separated from Punjab in 1966 to become the 17th state of India.**
- And the erstwhile state of **East Punjab was now divided into two states that is Haryana and Punjab.**
- Some **territory was also transferred to Himachal Pradesh**, then a Union territory.
- And the city of **Chandigarh** became a **Union territory to serve as the provisional capital of both the Punjab and Haryana.**
- **Constitutional Provisions for Creation of States:**
 - Indian constitution **empowers the Union government to create new states out of existing states or two merge one state with another.** This process is called **reorganisation of the states.**
 - The basis of reorganisation could be **linguistic, religious, ethnic or administrative.**
 - **Article 3** provides the following procedure:
 - **Presidential reference** is sent to the State Assembly.
 - After presidential reference, **a resolution is tabled and passed in the Assembly.**
 - The Assembly has to pass a **Bill creating the new State/States.**
 - **A separate Bill has to be ratified by Parliament.**

Advantages	Disadvantages
Better management of economic resources	Possibility of increase in the inter-State water, power, and boundary disputes
More investment opportunities	The feeling of nationalism would diminish in the cries of regional autonomy
Faster economic growth	Small states depend to a substantial extent on the central government for financial aid
More people of the same small state and same province will have a say in their state affairs	Different statehood may lead to the hegemony of the dominant community

Current Statehood Demands in India

- **Vidarbha:**
 - It comprises the **Amravati and Nagpur divisions of eastern Maharashtra.**

- **Delhi:**
 - To gain the control of such substantive powers, Delhi government is aspiring for full statehood.
- **Harit Pradesh:**
 - It consists of agriculturally dominated districts of **Western Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Purvanchal:**
 - It is a geographic region of north-central India, which comprises the **eastern end of Uttar Pradesh state**.
- **Bodoland:**
 - The Bodos are the largest ethnic and linguistic community in **northern Assam**.
- **Saurashtra:**
 - Kathiawar Peninsula, also called Saurashtra Peninsula, peninsula in **southwestern Gujarat state**.
- **Gorkhaland:**
 - It is a proposed state covering areas inhabited by the ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people, namely **Darjeeling hills and Dooars in the northern part of West Bengal**.

4. Draft Anti-Trafficking Bill

Why in News

Recently the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** released **Draft anti-trafficking Bill, the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021**.

- The bill once finalised will need the Cabinet approval and assent from both the houses of Parliament to become a Law.
- A **previous draft** had been introduced in 2018 but that **could not be introduced in Rajya Sabha** amid stiff opposition from Parliamentarians and experts.

Key Points

- **Criticism to the Old Bill:**
 - According to the **United Nations'** human rights experts, it was **not in accordance with the international human rights laws**.
 - The Bill seemed to **combine sex work and migration with trafficking**.
 - The Bill was criticised for **addressing trafficking through a criminal law perspective instead of complementing it with a human-rights based and victim-centred approach**.

- It was also criticised for promoting “rescue raids” by the police as well as **institutionalisation of victims in the name of rehabilitation.**
- It was pointed out that **certain vague provisions would lead to blanket criminalisation of activities** that do not necessarily relate to trafficking.
- **Provisions in the New Bill:**
 - It extends to **all citizens inside as well as outside India,**
 - **Persons on any ship or aircraft registered in India** wherever it may be or carrying Indian citizens wherever they may be,
 - **A foreign national or a stateless person** who has his or her residence in India at the time of commission of offence under this Act, and
 - The law will apply to every offence of **trafficking in persons with cross-border implications.**
 - **Victims Covered:**
 - It extends **beyond the protection of women and children as victims to now include transgenders as well as any person** who may be a victim of trafficking.
 - It also does away with the provision that a victim necessarily needs to be transported from one place to another to be defined as a victim.
 - **Defines ‘Exploitation’:**
 - The exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation including pornography, any act of physical exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or forced removal of organs, illegal clinical drug trials or illegal bio-medical research.
 - **Government Officers as Offenders:**
 - Offenders **will also include defence personnel** and government servants, doctors and paramedical staff or anyone in a position of authority.
 - **Penalty:**
 - A minimum of seven years which can go up to an imprisonment of 10 years and a fine of Rs 5 lakh in most cases of child trafficking.
 - In case of the trafficking of more than one child, the **penalty is now life imprisonment.**
 - **Similarity to Money laundering Act:**
 - Property bought via **such income as well as used for trafficking can now be forfeited** with provisions set in place, similar to that of the **money laundering Act.**
 - **Investigation Agency:**

- The **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** shall act as the national investigating and coordinating agency responsible for prevention and combating of trafficking in persons.
- **National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee:**
 - Once the law is enacted, the Centre will notify and establish a National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee, for ensuring overall effective implementation of the provisions of this law.
 - This committee will have representation from various ministries with the home secretary as the chairperson and secretary of the women and child development ministry as co-chair.
 - **State and district level anti-human trafficking committees** will also be constituted.
- **Significance:**
 - The transgender community, and any other person, has been included which will automatically **bring under its scope activity such as organ harvesting.**
 - Also, **cases such as forced labour**, in which people lured with jobs end up in other countries where their passports and documentation is taken away and they are made to work, will also be covered by this new law.
- **Legislations in India that Prohibits Human Trafficking:**
 - **Article 23 (1)** in the constitution of India prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour.
 - The **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA)** penalizes trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.
 - India also **prohibits bonded and forced labour** through the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, Child Labour (Prohibition and Abolition) Act 1986, and Juvenile Justice Act.
 - **Sections 366(A) and 372 of the Indian Penal Code**, prohibits kidnapping and selling minors into prostitution respectively.
 - Apart from this, **the Factories Act, 1948** guaranteed the protection of rights of workers.
- **International Conventions, Protocols and Campaigns:**
 - **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons**, especially Women and Children in 2000 as a part of the **UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime**. The **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** is responsible for **implementing the protocol**. It offers practical help to states with drafting laws, creating comprehensive national anti-trafficking strategies, and assisting with resources to implement them.
 - **Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air**. It entered into force on 28th January 2004. This also supplements the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime. The Protocol is

- aimed at the protection of rights of migrants and the reduction of the power and influence of organized criminal groups that abuse migrants.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is a non-binding declaration** that establishes the right of every human to live with dignity and prohibits slavery.
 - **Blue Heart Campaign:** The Blue Heart Campaign is an international anti-trafficking program started by the UNODC.
 - **Sustainable Development Goals:** Various SDGs aim to end trafficking by targeting its roots and means viz. **Goal 5** (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), **Goal 8** (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and **Goal 16** (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Fly Ash

Why in News

National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Limited has invited Expression of Interest (EOI) for sale of fly ash, in its endeavour to achieve 100% utilization of fly ash, from the designated plants of the Middle East and other regions.

- Fly Ash is a byproduct from burning of coal in the thermal power generation.

Key Points

- Fly Ash:
 - About:
 - It is called fly ash because it is transported from the combustion chamber by exhaust gases.
 - It is collected from the exhaust gases by **electrostatic precipitators or bag filters**.
 - An **electrostatic precipitator (ESP)** is defined as a **filtration device** that is used to remove fine particles like smoke and fine dust from the flowing gas.
 - It is the commonly used device for air pollution control.

- **Composition:**
 - Fly ash includes substantial amounts of silicon dioxide (SiO_2), aluminium oxide (Al_2O_3), ferric oxide (Fe_2O_3) and calcium oxide (CaO).
- **Properties:**
 - **Resemble Portland cement** but is chemically different.
 - Portland cement is a binding material in the form of a finely ground powder that is manufactured by burning and grinding a **mixture of limestone and clay**.
 - Its chemical composition includes **calcium silicates, calcium aluminate and calcium aluminoferrite**.
 - Exhibit **ceementitious** properties.
 - A cementitious material is one that hardens when mixed with water.
- **Uses:**
 - It is used in concrete and cement products, road base, metal recovery, and mineral filler among others.
- **Harmful Effects:**
 - Fly ash particles are **toxic air pollutants**. They can trigger heart disease, cancer, respiratory diseases and stroke.
 - When combined with water they **cause leaching of heavy metals** in ground water.
 - It also **pollutes the soil**, and affects the root development system of trees.
- **Fly Ash Utilisation:**
 - NTPC has **collaborated with Cement manufacturers** around the country to supply Fly Ash.
 - To promote the use of Fly Ash bricks in building construction, NTPC has set up **Fly Ash brick manufacturing Plants at its Coal based Thermal Power Plants**.
 - These bricks are being **utilized in Plants as well as township construction activities** exclusively.
 - On average, 60 million Fly Ash bricks are being manufactured annually by NTPCs own Fly Ash brick Plants.
 - As per the MoEF&CC directives, NTPC stations must keep at least **20% of total Fly Ash produced** in reserve for the issue to Fly Ash brick/blocks/tiles manufacturers and issuing Fly Ash free of cost to them.
 - About 9% of the total Fly Ash produced in NTPCs stations, is being utilized by Fly Ash bricks/blocks and tiles manufacturing units annually.

- During the year 2020-21, almost 15 NTPC stations supplied Fly Ash to various Road projects and Ash utilization crossed by nearly 20 million tonnes.
- Over the last five years the fly ash utilisation has grown up by 80% in the country.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)** has focused on new construction technologies such as **using fly ash bricks** that are innovative, and environmentally friendly.
- Even state governments have come out with their Fly ash utilization policies, e.g. **Maharashtra was the first state to adopt the policy.**
- A **web portal for monitoring of fly ash generation and utilization and a mobile based application** titled “**ASHTRACK**” has been launched by the Government.
- **GST** rates on fly ash and its products have been reduced to 5%.

NTPC

- NTPC Ltd. is a **central Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Power.**
- **Aim:** To provide reliable power and related solutions in an economical, efficient and environment-friendly manner, driven by innovation and agility.
- It became a **Maharatna company** in May 2010.
- India's largest power generating company.

6. New Norms for Independent Directors

Why in News

The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)** has approved stricter norms related to appointment of **independent directors** and decided to introduce a **framework for accredited investors** along with other measures.

- Sebi is a statutory body established in accordance with the provisions of the **Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.** The basic functions of the Sebi is to protect the interests of investors in securities and to **promote and regulate the securities market.**

Key Points

- **Independent Directors:**
 - Independent directors **can be appointed only through a special resolution** passed by shareholders. A special resolution **requires 75% of votes in favour** to be passed.

- The regulator has also elaborated and strengthened the **disclosure requirements for the skills required** to be an independent director.
- The **nomination and remuneration committee** of the board of directors, which decides on appointments and compensation, and the **audit committee** should have **two-thirds independent directors compared to a simple majority now**.
 - All **related party transactions** (between a company and its related entities) **shall be approved by only independent directors** on the audit committee.
- Also, a listed company will be required to **disclose the resignation letter of an independent director**.
 - Also, there will be a **one-year cooling period for an independent director transitioning to a whole-time director** in the same company/holding/subsidiary/associate company or any company belonging to the **promoter group**.

Independent Director

- An Independent Director (also sometimes known as an outside director) is a director on a board of directors **representing minority shareholders** and who does not have a pecuniary relationship with the company or related persons, except for sitting fees.
- Their role is to take a stand unambiguously and independently to have a check and balance on the whims of majority shareholders that may expose the company to unwarranted risks.
- The **Companies Act, 2013** has mandated all **listed public companies to have at least one-third** of the total Directors to be independent.
- Their role requires them to be clinical while businesses expect them to be practical, that's the tight rope they walk on.
- **Accredited Investors:**
 - Sebi has approved this **new category of wealthy, well-informed investors** who will be allowed to **invest in riskier products**, not usually allowed to individuals.
 - These entities (accredited investors) could be individuals, family trusts, proprietorships, etc.
 - They will be given the **flexibility to invest** the less than minimum amount mandated in Sebi rules and also to some extent get relaxation from regulatory requirements.
 - They will enhance the attractiveness of **alternative investment funds (AIFs)**.
 - AIF means any fund established in India which is a **privately pooled investment vehicle** which collects funds from

sophisticated investors, whether **Indian or foreign**, for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy for the benefit of its investors.

▪ **Other Important Changes Undertaken:**

- To provide easy access to investors to participate in **public and rights issues** by using various payment avenues, Sebi has also decided to permit banks, other than scheduled banks, to act as a banker to such issues.
 - Unlike initial and follow-up public offering, the rights issue is not open for the general public but only to existing shareholders of the company.
- Sebi also **increased the maximum reward amount for an informant who blows the whistle on insider trading** to Rs 10 crore from Rs 1 crore now.
 - **Insider trading** involves trading in a public company's stock by someone who has non-public, material information about that stock for any reason.
- The regulator has also approved amendments to its **mutual fund regulations** which requires **asset management companies (AMCs)** to use more funds in riskier schemes (New funds).
 - Currently, AMCs have to invest only 1% of the amount raised in a new fund offer, or Rs 50 lakh, whichever is lower.
- The new norms will be effective **from 1st January, 2022**.

▪ **Significance:**

- The changes seek to strengthen the **corporate governance** practices as well as **attract more investors**.
- It will help **maintain the interest of minority shareholders** in the corporate boardroom where their representation is minimal.
- This should hopefully result in **truly 'independent' independent directors** and not those with merely a semblance of independence.

7. Melting of Arctic's 'Last Ice Area'

Why in News

The 'Last Ice Area' (LIA), located in the Arctic's Ice north of Greenland, has started melting earlier than what the scientists had expected.

Key Points

▪ **Last Ice Area:**

- This region is located **north of Greenland and Ellesmere Island** in the Canadian territory of Nunavut.

- This area was believed to be **strong enough to withstand global warming**.
 - The **total disappearance of summer ice** in the Arctic was estimated by the **year 2040**, however the '**Last Ice Area**' was the exception.
- **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-Canada** was believed to be the **first** to call this area the '**Last Ice Area**'.
- **Importance:**
 - It was thought to be able to **help ice-dependent species** as ice in the surrounding areas melted away.
 - It is used by **polar bears to hunt for seals** who use ice to build dens for their offspring. **Walruses** too, use the surface of the ice for **foraging** (to search for food).
 - Sea ice is a **highway for inuit**, who use it to travel and hunt.
 - The **term Inuit** refers broadly to the **Arctic indigenous population of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland**.
- **Reasons for Melting:**
 - About **80% of thinning** can be attributed to **weather-related factors** such as winds that break up and move the ice around.
 - The remaining **20%** can be attributed to **longer-term thinning of the ice** due to **global warming**.
- **About Arctic:**
 - The Arctic is a **polar region** located at the **northernmost part of Earth**.
 - The Arctic **consists of** the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska (United States), Canada, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.
 - Land within the Arctic region has seasonally varying snow and ice cover.
 - Since 2013, **India has had observer status in the Arctic Council**, which is the predominant inter-governmental forum for cooperation on the environmental and development aspects of the Arctic.
- **Impact of Melting Arctic Ice:**
 - **Global Climate:** The **Arctic and Antarctic** act like the world's refrigerator. Since they are covered in white snow and ice that reflect heat back into space (**Albedo effect**), they balance out other parts of the world that absorb heat.
 - **Coastal Communities:** Global average sea level has risen by about **7-8 inches since 1900**, and it's getting worse. **Rising seas endanger coastal cities and small island nations** by exacerbating coastal flooding and storm surge.
 - **Food Security:** **Polar vortexes, increased heat waves, and unpredictability of weather** caused by ice loss are already causing significant damage to crops on which global food systems depend.

- **Permafrost & Global Warming:** Permafrost in the Arctic region (ground that is permanently frozen) stores large amounts of **methane, which is a greenhouse gas** that contributes to **climate change**.
- **Biodiversity Threat:** Melting of the Arctic ice puts the Arctic region's vibrant **biodiversity** under serious threat.
- **India's interests in Arctic:**
 - Recently, **India participated in the 3rd Arctic Science Ministerial (ASM)** and shared plans for research and long-term cooperation in the Arctic Region.

8. Project BOLD: KVIC

Why in News

Recently, the **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** launched a project named **Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought (BOLD)** from the village **NichlaMandwa in Udaipur, Rajasthan**.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- It is a **statutory body established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956**.
- It is charged with the **planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programmes** for the development of **Khadi and other village industries** in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- It functions under the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Under the project 5000 saplings of special bamboo species - **Bambusa Tulda and Bambusa Polymorpha** from Assam - have been **planted over 16 acres of vacant arid Gram Panchayat land** of village NichlaMandwa.
 - KVIC has thus created a **world record of planting the highest number of bamboo saplings on a single day at one location**.
 - It is the **first of its kind exercise** in India. It seeks to **create bamboo-based green patches in arid and semi-arid land zones**.
 - It has been launched as part of KVIC's "**Khadi Bamboo Festival**" to celebrate 75 years of independence "**Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav**".
- **Reason for Selecting Bamboo:**
 - It **grows very fast** and in about three years' time, they could be harvested.

- It is also known for **conserving water and reducing evaporation** of water from the land surface, which is an important feature in arid and **drought-prone regions**.
- **Significance:**
 - It will **reduce desertification** and **provide livelihood and multi-disciplinary rural industry support**.
 - It will also act as havens of **sustainable development and food security**.
- **Extension:**
 - KVIC is set to replicate the Project at Village **Dholera in Ahmedabad district in Gujarat and Leh-Ladakh region** by August this year.
 - Total 15,000 bamboo saplings will be planted before August 2021.
- **Other Initiatives to fight Desertification:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**.
 - **Soil Health Card Scheme**.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojna (PKSY)**.
 - **National Mission for Green India**.
 - India has ratified the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to 'Changpa' community of India, consider the following statement:

1. They live mainly in the State of Uttarakhand.
2. They rear the Pashmina goats that yield a fine wool.
3. They are kept in the category of Scheduled Tribes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Changpa or Champa are a semi-nomadic tribe found mainly in the Changtang region of Ladakh.
- The Changpas rear the highly pedigreed and prized Changra goats that yield the rare Pashmina (Cashmere) fibre. The pashmina fibre is the finest fibre of all goat hair.
- As of 2001, the Changpa were classified as a Scheduled Tribe under the Indian government's reservation program of affirmative action.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. The International Energy Agency (IEA) is an UN body established in 1974.
2. India became the Associate member of IEA in 2017.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- **International Energy Agency (IEA)** is an **autonomous Intergovernmental Organisation** established in 1974 in Paris, France. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
 - IEA mainly focuses on its energy policies which include economic development, energy security and environmental protection. These policies are also known as the 3 E's of IEA.
- India **became an Associate member of IEA in March 2017** but it was in engagement with IEA long before its association with the organization. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Recently, India has inked a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the IEA to strengthen cooperation in global energy security, stability and sustainability.

3. Which of the given statements with respect to Jagannath Temple in Puri is/are INCORRECT?

1. The temple famous for its annual Rath Yatra is dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
2. Located in coastal Odisha, it is also called the Black Pagoda.
3. It is one of the Char Dham.

Options:

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 3 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Jagannath temple in Puri is famous for its annual Rath Yatra, dedicated to Jagannath, a form of Lord Vishnu.
- It is the Sun Temple at Konark, Odisha which is referred to as the Black Pagoda.
- Puri Jagannath Mandir is one four great 'Char Dham' pilgrimage sites

4. Consumer Price Index can be used for which of the following?

1. Identifying periods of inflation or deflation
2. Inspecting price stability
3. Tool for inflation targeting
4. Understanding the real value of salaries, wages, and pensions

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 3 and 4 only
- c. 1, 3 and 4 only
- d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services, such as transportation, food, and medical care. It is calculated by taking price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods and averaging them.
- It can be useful for the following purposes:
 - Identifying periods of inflation or deflation
 - Inspecting price stability
 - Tool for inflation targeting (Indian uses CPI as a benchmark for inflation targeting)
 - Understanding the real value of salaries, wages, and pensions

5. With reference to the H10N3, consider the following statements:

1. It is a subtype of the Influenza A virus which is commonly known as the bird flu virus.
2. It can spread through respiratory droplets in animals.

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, China has reported the first case of human infection with the H10N3 strain of bird flu in Jiangsu province.
- **H10N3** is a subtype of the **Influenza A virus** which is commonly known as the **bird flu virus**. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
 - It is a low pathogenic, or relatively less severe, strain of the virus in poultry and the risk of it spreading on a large scale is very low.
 - Among animals, it **can spread through respiratory droplets**, similar to flu and Covid-19. Hence, statement 2 is correct.

6. Consider the following statements:

1. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a political, economic and military organisation of Eurasian region.
2. The Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is located in Tashkent.

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

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.
- It's a **Eurasian political, economic and military organisation** aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. Hence, statement 1 is correct
 - It was created in 2001.
 - The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and entered into force in 2003.
- The SCO's official languages are Russian and Chinese.
- Eight countries are part of SCO, which are: Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.
- **SCO has two Permanent Bodies:**
 - SCO Secretariat in Beijing (China), and
 - Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). Hence, statement 2 is correct.

- The Chairmanship of SCO is by rotation for a year by Member States.
- The Republic of Tajikistan has assumed chairmanship of SCO for 2021-22.



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. The recent phenomenon of Brexit and the withdrawal of the USA from the Trans-Pacific Partnership reflect the global mood of resistance towards regional

cooperation and emphasis on bolstering the national identities. Discuss (250 words)

Approach

- Give brief introduction of the Brexit and USA' withdrawal from TPP.
- Describe the reasons for declining global cooperation and increasing national identities.
- Give conclusion and way forward by underling the possible loss due to these developments.

2Q. The needs of development must be balanced with that of climate justice. In this context, explain the relevance of climate justice in the present times. (250 words)

Approach

- Mention the recent events which have put renewed focus on the concept of climate justice.
- Explain the factors which determine the relevance of climate justice in the present times.
- Conclude by mentioning about the need to shift to sustainable development.