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JULY

06.07.2021

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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Crafting a unique partnership with Africa

Context:

- In the light of the **recent visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister to Kenya**, the article analyzes **the potential of India-Africa cooperation in agriculture** even as China has been exponentially deepening its relationship with African nations.

Background:

- The relations between India and Africa have long historical roots right from ancient times up until the anti-colonialism struggle. This historical solidarity has today grown into a modern partnership.
- **Africa is considered a foreign policy priority by India** for many reasons and its engagement with the African continent has been multifaceted.

India-Africa agricultural cooperation:

- Africa supplies a **vast basket of agricultural goods to India** dominated by items such as fruits, nuts, grains and pulses.
- India's outreach to African nations in terms of agricultural cooperation currently includes the following **institutional and individual capacity-building initiatives**.
 - India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development in Malawi
 - Supply of machinery and provision of soft loans
- Indian farmers have **purchased over 6,00,000 hectares of land for commercial farming** in Africa.
- There is a substantial presence of **Indian entrepreneurs in the African agricultural ecosystem**.
- A unique example of cooperation and partnership in the agricultural sector is the case of the Kerala government trying to meet its requirement for raw cashew nuts from countries in Africa. There are also proposals to create a **jointly-owned brand of Africa-Kollam cashews**.

Significance of the cooperation:

- With **65% of the world's uncultivated arable land**, employing over 60% of the workforce, and accounting for almost 20% of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP, **agriculture is critical to Africa's economy.**
- **African agriculture is plagued by obsolete methods and technologies.** India's cooperation and partnership through sharing of necessary resources and knowledge can go a long way in providing a much-needed boost to the critical agricultural sector in Africa.
- This cooperation is also crucial given the possible **business prospects** that they can give rise to and to provide credible alternatives to the increasing involvement of Chinese stakeholders in the sector.
- The putting to use of the unexplored potential of Africa in the agricultural sector will go a long way in ensuring **not only Africa's food security but also global food security.**

Chinese engagement in Africa:

Deepening of Chinese influence in Africa:

- Currently, **China is among Africa's largest trading partners and its single biggest creditor.**
- Chinese companies have been implementing critical infrastructure projects in Africa and its venture capital funds are investing in African fintech firms, while other smaller enterprises are expanding across the width and breadth of Africa.

Reasons for Chinese interest in Africa:

- The exponential growth in the China-Africa economic ties and its **attempts to emerge as an alternative to traditional western powers** is primarily driven by the following factors:
 - Ensuring access to **Africa's natural resources and its untapped markets.**
 - Chinese-built industrial parks and economic zones in Africa are emerging as new destinations for low-cost, labour-intensive manufacturing units that are relocating from China. Thus they seem to be **new avenues for Chinese production centres.**
 - Chinese operations in Africa are important to accumulate global experience in management, risk and capital investments. This would be a valuable experience as China's model, if successful here, could be heralded as a **replica for the larger global south.**
 - The Chinese engagement will help them dominate the market in the long run thus offering a unique opportunity to **build 'brand China'.**

Engagement in the agricultural sector:

- Though Chinese entities have been active in Africa's agricultural landscape for decades now, the nature, form and actors involved have undergone substantial change.
 - Chinese firms are **introducing advanced agri-tech** like drone technology in countries like Zambia.
 - Over 20 **Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs)** have been set up in Africa. These centres are involved in developing new crop varieties and increasing crop yields. These ATDCs partner with local universities, conduct workshops and classes for officials and provide training and lease equipment to smallholder farmers.
 - Chinese companies are **purchasing large-scale commercial farms**.
 - Chinese corporations are also entering the agri-infra sector.
 - African agriculture experts, officials and farmers are provided **opportunities to augment skills and be trained in China**.

Challenges in the relation:

- The highly insular Chinese diaspora in Africa, the **large trade imbalance mainly in favour of the Chinese, looming debt**, increasing competition with local businesses and a negative perception around China have had a negative impact on the relations between China and African nations.
- Larger commercial farms run by Mandarin-speaking managers and the presence of small-scale Chinese farmers in local markets have further aggravated these stresses.

Recommendations for India:

Prioritizing agricultural cooperation:

- The future of India-Africa cooperation is agriculture.
- Indian congruence with African countries in the agriculture sector is expanding. It is vital to **prioritize and channel resources into augmenting partnerships in agriculture**.

Countering Chinese moves in the region:

- While India's Africa strategy exists independently, it is important to be **cognizant of China's increasing footprint in the region** and India should desist from neglecting Chinese engagement in African agriculture.
- India should frame appropriate policies and implement them to counter the Chinese moves in the region.
 - State governments and civil society organisations need to be encouraged to **identify opportunities and invest directly in the agricultural sector of Africa**.

- Indian industries need to be incentivized to tap into African agri-business value chains and measures need to be taken to **link Indian technology firms and startups with partners in Africa**.
- A thorough impact assessment needs to be conducted of the existing capacity-building initiatives in agriculture being taken up by India in Africa. The **development partnership needs to be in line with African priorities**.

2. SC aghast that Section 66A of IT Act is still used

Context:

The Supreme Court found it distressing that people were still booked and tried under **Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act** even **six years after it struck down** the provision as **unconstitutional** and a **violation of free speech**.

Section 66A of IT Act:

- Section 66A gave authorities the power to arrest anyone accused of **posting content on social media that could be deemed 'offensive'**.
- It provided punishment for **sending offensive messages through communication services**.
- Under the section, a **conviction** could fetch a maximum of **three years in jail and a fine**.
- In **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)**, the Supreme Court in 2015 had **scrapped Section 66A** of the IT Act, 2000.
- The court ruled that as it **did not distinguish between speech that was merely "offensive or annoying"** and that which was **guilty of inciting a disruption of public order**, Section 66A was liable to have a **chilling effect on free speech**.

Way Forward:

- The **number of cases** registered under Section 66A had actually **increased post the judgment**.
 - A mechanism needs to be set in place to disseminate the Shreya Singhal judgment to **every police station and trial court in the country**.
- There is **no clear definition of what constitutes "hate speech" in the IPC**.
- Legally, **for criminal sections to be invoked against a speech** it has to lead to **violence or disturbance of law and order**.
- Given the increasing threat posed by hate speech, the need of the hour is to **define "hate speech"**.

3. Will a national judiciary work?

Background:

- Many law commissions and the judiciary in many cases have called on the administration to consider and implement **All India Judicial Services (AIJS)**.
 - The idea for an 'All India Judicial Service (AIJS)' was first proposed by the **14th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1958**, aimed at creating a centralised cadre of District Judges.
 - In the **All-India Judges case in 1992** the apex court had opined that the recommendations of the Law Commission on the setting up of AIJS should be examined and implemented. Similar opinions were expressed in the All India Judges Association Vs. Union of India (2002) case as well.
- **In 2019 there had been a consultative process for the creation of the All India Judicial Service (AIJS)**.
 - While a few states and high courts supported the proposal, most rejected it or are yet to respond.
- In this context, the article analyzes the feasibility of the All India Judicial Service.

All India Judicial services:

- The AIJS envisages **recruiting officers for subordinate courts through a national entrance test**.
- Those who clear the pan-India test would be appointed by high courts and the State governments.

Constitutional perspective:

- **Article 233(1) of the Constitution** states that appointments, posting and promotion of, district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the corresponding High Court.
- **Article 312 (1)** empowers Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services, including an AIJS, common to the Union and the States.
- **The 42nd Constitutional amendment** in 1976 shifted the domain of administration of justice constitution and organisation of all courts, except the Supreme Court and the High Courts into the concurrent list from the previous state list.

Arguments in favour of AIJS:

- The AIJS will help **remove any scope for judicial or executive intervention in the appointments to the lower judiciary** and result in increased transparency in the appointment process.
- It will help **streamline the appointment process** of the lower judiciary. This will allow the vacancies to be filled without any unnecessary delay.
- AIJS will give an opportunity for induction of suitably qualified fresh legal talent selected through a proper all-India merit selection system and will thus help **strengthen the overall justice delivery system in India.**

Concerns with respect to AIJS:

- The article expresses concerns over certain aspects of the proposed AIJS:

Against the principle of federalism:

- Under the envisaged AIJS, the fundamental power of the States to make rules and govern the appointment of district judges would rest with the union government.
- The AIJS would lead to a scenario where the Union government's powers would increase at the cost of the state governments.
- This will go **against the principle of federalism and the basic structure doctrine.**

Concerns for the subordinate judiciary:

- Another aspect of concern is that the operationalization of the AIJS could **severely curtail the promotional avenues of the subordinate judiciary.**
- Currently, fifty per cent of the posts of district judges are to be filled by promotion from the subordinate judicial service. This will decrease with direct recruitment under the proposed AIJS.

Concerns over language proficiency:

- Another fundamental concern would be **the language barrier.**
- Since cases in lower courts are argued in local languages, there are apprehensions as to how a person from a particular state can hold a hearing in another state that has a completely different language.
- Judges recruited through a centralized process may not know the local languages of the States in which they are posted. The lack of understanding of the local language and customs **could affect the quality of judgments.**

Fears over social implications:

- Most States have a reservation policy in force for marginalised and deprived sections of society in the lower judiciary. The reservation in these states is higher than that envisaged in the AIJS, thus there are fears that such sections may lose by the implementation of the AIJS.
 - Tamil Nadu provides for a roster-based reservation of 69%, of which 30% is for women.

4. 'ONORC scheme in Delhi, Bengal soon'

Context:

'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) scheme.

Details:

- Delhi and West Bengal are expected to roll out the **'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) scheme by the end of July 2021.**
- **Chhattisgarh** has started the **process for procurement of ePOS [electronic Point of Sale].**
- The **low penetration of Aadhaar in Assam** due to concerns linked to the **National Population Register (NPR)** is hampering the implementation of ONORC there.
- ONORC plan **aims to empower all National Food Security Act migrant beneficiaries** to access foodgrains from any Fair Price Shop [FPS] of their choice anywhere in the country by using their same/existing ration card with biometric authentication.

Note:

These are the only four States **yet to come on board the ration card portability scheme** that the Centre has been pushing as the solution for migrant workers' difficulty to access subsidised food, especially during the pandemic.

5. Survey of Class 3 students to set baseline for literacy goals

Context:

The Ministry of Education has launched **National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN).**

Details:

- The vision of the NIPUN Bharat Mission is to **create an enabling environment** to ensure the universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy.
- It is to ensure that **every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy** by the end of **Class 3, by 2026-27**.

6. CoWin made open source: PM

What's in News?

CoWin Global Conclave.

- India has endeavoured to share the tech-enabled vaccination platform COWIN as a free public good with the world.
- The Prime Minister has said that the **CoWin platform is being made open source** and it will be available to all countries.

CoWIN:

- **COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (CoWIN) system** is a digitalised platform to be used to effectively roll out and scale up the mechanism for COVID Vaccine Distribution System, nationally.
- It is a **digital platform launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** to help agencies keep a track of Covid-19 vaccination and allow Indians to apply for the vaccine.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. Policy black holes spook space investors

Context:

Concerns of potential foreign investors in India's space sector.

Issue:

- The **Department of Space is both the sectoral regulator and a service provider by way of its role in overseeing the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).**

- The potential foreign investors in India's space sector are unsure if their **licence applications would get fair consideration.**
- They are concerned about a possible **conflict of interest.**

Details:

- In a significant **departure from the 'virtual monopoly' of the state-controlled ISRO and allied entities in the space sector,** reforms were announced in 2020 to open the sector to private investors.
- **Foreign Direct Investment of up to 100%** has been allowed under the **government route in satellite establishment and operation,** subject to the sectoral guidelines of the Department of Space and ISRO.
- **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe),** the newly created regulatory body, has received at least 26 applications from Indian and foreign firms that include proposals to set up ground stations and make and launch satellites.

Way Forward:

- The Department of Space acts as the regulator, but since it is a major service provider through ISRO, there is **scope for a conflict of interest.**
- The **regulatory structure needs to be refined and there is a need for more clarity** in terms of the processes for authorisation to launch a satellite, the frequency allocation mechanism and even the details of different agencies involved in these clearances.

8. Cities along rivers urged to include conservation plans

Context:

Policy document from the National Mission for Clean Ganga has set out norms for river conservation plans.

Guidelines:

- The policy spells out **provisions in the National Water Policy.**
- It says that the **cities situated on river banks** will have to **incorporate river conservation plans** when they prepare their Master Plans.
- It has been instructed that the **"river-sensitive" plans** must be **practical and consider questions of encroachment and land ownership.**

- A key aspect of conserving and protecting rivers and riverine resources involves **increasing green cover in the vicinity of the river** by creating green buffers, removing concrete structures and employing green infrastructure.
- The Master Plan **should not mandate specific technologies**, but it can **create an environment for facilitating the use of state-of-the-art technologies** for river management.

Technologies being used across the world successfully for river management:

- Satellite-based monitoring of water quality
- Artificial intelligence for riverine biodiversity mapping
- Big data and citizen science for river-health monitoring
- Unmanned aerial vehicles for floodplain mapping.

Note:

- The recommendations are currently for towns that are on the main stem of the Ganga.
- As per the policy document, there are **97 towns encompassing five States** — Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

9. Facial recognition used to verify job beneficiaries: govt.

Context:

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has admitted to the use of **facial recognition technology (FRT)** for **online verification of beneficiaries at vaccination centres** in a recent RTI query.

Concerns:

- The ministry has failed to provide any **legislative or legal order authorising the use of such technology**.
- It said that **no privacy impact assessment of the use of FRT was conducted** prior to its deployment.
- The government was also unable to provide **any information related to the accuracy of the FRT used**.

Facial Recognition Technology:

- Facial recognition is a **biometric technology** that uses **distinctive features on the face to identify and distinguish an individual**.

- Facial recognition technology has been introduced primarily for two purposes:
 - As a **compare and contrast tool** meant for **identification** based on existing information or,
 - To **create a repository** on the basis of which the **process of identification can be enhanced**.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. What India must keep in mind when it comes to Turkey

As a new round of geopolitical jousting begins on India's north-western frontiers, Delhi must deal with a number of new actors that have carved out a role for themselves in the region.

Overambitious Turkey

- Our focus today is on Turkey's regional ambitions (particularly in Afghanistan) and their implications for India.
- Ankara is in negotiations with the US on taking charge of the Kabul airport which is critical for an international presence in Afghanistan that is coming under the Taliban's control.
- Turkey has been running Kabul airport security for a while, but doing so after the US pullout will be quite demanding.
- Taking a longer view, though, Turkey is not a new regional actor in India's northwest.

Turkey and Afghanistan

- Ankara and Kabul have recently celebrated the centennial of the establishment of diplomatic relations.
- Through this century, Turkey has engaged purposefully with Afghanistan over a wide domain.

- While it joined the NATO military mission in Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban at the end of 2001, Turkey avoided any combat role and differentiated itself from the Western powers.
- Ankara has contributed to the training of the Afghan military and police forces.
- It has also undertaken much independent humanitarian and developmental work.

Affinity with Pakistan

- Turkey's good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan have also given space for Ankara to present itself as a mediator between the warring South Asian neighbours.
- Turkey's "Heart of Asia" conference or the Istanbul Process has been a major diplomatic vehicle for attempted Afghan reconciliation in the last few years.
- Widespread goodwill for Turkey in Afghanistan has now come in handy for the US in managing some elements of the post-withdrawal phase.
- In Pakistan, PM Imran Khan has rallied behind Erdogan's ambition to seize the leadership of the Islamic world from Saudi Arabia.
- Pakistan's Army Chief had to step in to limit the damage with Saudi Arabia, which has long been Pakistan's major economic benefactor.

Challenges for India

- Turkey's growing role in Afghanistan opens a more difficult phase in relations between Delhi and Ankara.
- India's opposition to alliances and Turkey's alignments reflected divergent international orientations of Delhi and Ankara after the Second World War.
- And Turkey's deepening bilateral military-security cooperation with Pakistan made it even harder for Delhi to take a positive view of Ankara.
- Turkey and Pakistan were part of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) that was set up in 1955 by the British.
- Although CENTO eventually wound up in 1979, Turkey and Pakistan remained close partners in a number of regional organizations and international forums like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Pre-Erdogan era Turkey

- The shared secular values between Delhi and Ankara in the pre-Erdogan era were not enough to overcome the strategic differences between the two in the Cold War.

- To make matters more complicated, the positive legacy of the Subcontinent's solidarity with the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, emerged out of its ruins in the early 20th century, accrued mostly to Pakistan.
- There were moments – during the tenures of PM Rajiv Gandhi and Mr Vajpayee, when India and Turkey seemed poised for a more productive relationship.
- But those have been rather few and far between.

Turkey's departure from Secularism

- Meanwhile, Turkey's Islamist internationalism under Recep Tayyip Erdogan has inevitably led to its deeper alliance with Pakistan, greater meddling in South Asia, and a sharper contraction with India.
- The Pakistani prism through which Delhi has long seen Ankara, however, has prevented it from fully appreciating the growing strategic salience of Turkey.
- Erdogan's active claim for leadership of the Islamic world has seen a more intensive Turkish political, religious, and cultural outreach to the Subcontinent's 600 million Muslims.

Self-goals on Kashmir

- Turkey has become the most active international supporter of Pakistan on the Kashmir question.
- Delhi is aware of Erdogan's hypocrisy on minority rights.
- While pitching for self-determination in Kashmir, Erdogan actively tramples on the rights of its Kurdish minority at home and confronts them across Turkey's border in Syria and Iraq.

Other ambitions in Asia

- Erdogan was quick to condemn the Bangladesh government's hanging of a senior extremist leader in 2016.
- But in a reflection of his strategic suppleness, Erdogan also offered strong political support for Dhaka on the Rohingya refugee crisis.
- As Bangladesh emerges as an attractive economy, Ankara is now stepping up its commercial cooperation with Dhaka.
- Turkey, which hosted the Caliphate in the Ottoman era, had natural spiritual resonance among the South Asian Muslims.

Riving the Caliphate

- With the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, Turkey's Westernization under Ataturk reduced its religious significance.
- Erdogan's Islamist politics are about regaining that salience.

- Erdogan's strategy marks the declining relevance of the old antinomies – between alliances and autonomy, East and West, North and South, Islam and the West, Arabs and the Jews – that so resonate with the traditional Indian foreign policy discourse.

Stance on Israel

- Turkey was the first Muslim-majority nation that established full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- Erdogan now actively mobilizes the Arab and Islamic world against Israel without breaking relations with Tel Aviv.
- Erdogan's outrage on Israel is about presenting himself as a better champion of Palestine than his Arab rivals.

India's option against Turkey

- India, which has been at the receiving end of Erdogan's internationalism, has multiple options in pushing back.
- The recent naval exercise between India and Greece in the Mediterranean offers a small hint of India's possibilities in Turkey's neighbourhood.
- Many Arab leaders reject Erdogan's policies that remind them of Ottoman imperialism.
- They resent Erdogan's support of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood that seek to overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East.
- There is much that India can do to up its game in the Arab world.

Lessons for India

- The new fluidity in geopolitics in India's extended neighbourhood to the west.
- Agency for regional powers is growing as the influence of great power weakens.
- Religious ideology, like the more secular ones, is a cover for the pursuit of power.
- Finally, Erdogan has carefully modulated his confrontation with major powers by avoiding a breakdown in relations.

Conclusion

- For Erdogan, the choices are not between black and white. That should be a good guide for India's own relations with Turkey.
- Delhi needs to vigorously challenge Turkey's positions where it must, seize the opportunities opened by regional resentments against Erdogan's

adventurism, and at the same time prepare for a more intensive bilateral engagement with Ankara.

2. Draft Anti-trafficking Bill 2021

The Ministry of Women and Child Welfare has invited suggestions and comments for its Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021 which it has released.

A re-attempted legislation

- A previous draft had been introduced in 2018 and had been passed by Lok Sabha despite stiff opposition from both parliamentarians as well as experts.
- It was later never introduced in Rajya Sabha.
- Experts say that nearly all the concerns raised in 2018 have been addressed in this new draft Bill.

Draft Anti-trafficking Bill 2021

The Bill has increased the scope of the nature of offences of trafficking as well as the kind of victims of these offences, with stringent penalties including life imprisonment, and even the death penalty in cases of an extreme nature.

Types of offenders

- The scope of the Bill vis offenders will also include defence personnel and government servants, doctors and paramedical staff or anyone in a position of authority.

Penalty

- In most cases of child trafficking, especially in the case of the trafficking of more than one child, the penalty is now life imprisonment.
- While the penalty will hold a minimum of seven years which can go up to an imprisonment of 10 years and a fine of Rs 5 lakh.
- In certain cases, even the death penalty can be sought.

Definition of exploitation

- Exploitation has been defined to include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation including pornography.
- It also includes 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.

Victims covered

- The Bill also 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.

Investigation Agency

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) shall act as the national investigating and coordinating agency responsible for the prevention and combating of trafficking in persons.

3. Indian Army Memorial in Italy

During his four-day visit to the UK and Italy, the Indian Army Chief will inaugurate the Indian Army Memorial at Cassino in Italy, about 140 km away from Rome.

What is the memorial about?

- The memorial commemorates over 3,100 Commonwealth servicemen who took part in the effort to liberate Italy in World War II.
- Apart from this, 900 Indian soldiers were also commemorated on this memorial.

What was happening in Italy in WWII?

- Under Benito Mussolini, Italy had joined Nazi Germany in 1936 and in 1940 it entered WWII (1939-1945) against the Allies.
- But in 1943, Mussolini was overthrown and instead, Italy declared war on Germany.

- The invasion of Italy by the Allies coincided with an armistice that was made with the Italians.
- Even so, the UK's National Army Museum notes that for two years during WWII, Italy became one of the war's most "exhausting campaigns" because they were facing a skilled and resolute enemy.

What was India's involvement in World War II?

- In the first half of the 1940s, India was still under British rule and the Indian Army fought in both the world wars.
- It comprised both Indian and European soldiers.
- Apart from this, there was the East India Company Army that also recruited both Indian and European soldiers and the British Army, which was also present in India.

India the largest volunteer

- Indian Army was the largest volunteer force during WWII, with over 2.5 million (more than 20 lakh) Indians participating.
- These troops fought the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) as part of the Allies.
- By 1945, the Allies had won, Italy had been liberated, Adolf Hitler was dead and India was barely a couple of years short of independence.
- However, while millions of Indians participated, their efforts are not always recognized.

4. NIPUN Bharat Programme

Union Minister for Education has launched a National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat).

NIPUN Bharat

- This scheme aims for ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy.
- It has been launched under the aegis of the centrally sponsored scheme of Samagra Shiksha.
- It would cover the learning needs of children in the age group of 3 to 9 years.
- The unique feature is that the goals of the Mission are set in the form of Lakshya Soochi or Targets for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.
- The Lakshyas are based on the learning outcomes developed by the NCERT and international research and ORF studies.

Envisaged outcomes

- Foundational skills enable to keep children in class thereby reducing the dropouts and improve transition rate from primary to upper primary and secondary stages.
- Activity-based learning and a conducive learning environment will improve the quality of education.
- Innovative pedagogies such as toy-based and experiential learning will be used in classroom transactions thereby making learning a joyful and engaging activity.
- Intensive capacity building of teachers
- Since almost every child attends early grades, therefore, focus at that stage will also benefit the socio-economic disadvantageous group thus ensuring access to equitable and inclusive quality education.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Arctic's 'Last Ice Area'

A part of the Arctic's ice called the "Last Ice Area", located north of Greenland, has melted before expected. Scientists had believed this area was strong enough to withstand global warming.

What is the Last Ice Area?

- In an article published in 2015, National Geographic noted that climate projections forecast the total disappearance of summer ice in the Arctic by the year 2040.
- However, the only place that would be able to withstand a warming climate would be this area of ice called the "Last Ice Area".
- But while this piece of ice above northern Canada and Greenland was expected to last the longest time, it is now showing signs of melting.
- WWF claims that WWF-Canada was the first to call this area the 'Last Ice Area'.

Why is the area important?

- The area is important because it was thought to be able to help ice-dependent species as ice in the surrounding areas melted away.

- The area is used by polar bears to hunt for seals who use ice to build dens for their offspring.
- Walrus too, use the surface of the ice for food search.

When did the area start changing?

- The first sign of change in LIA was observed in 2018.
- Further, in August last year, sea ice showed its “vulnerability” to the long-term effects of climate change.
- The ice in LIA has been thinning gradually over the years much like other parts of the Arctic Ocean.

What are the reasons that explain the change?

- About 80 per cent of thinning can be attributed to weather-related factors such as winds that break up and move the ice around.
- The remaining 20 per cent can be attributed to the longer-term thinning of the ice due to global warming.

6. Anti-Dumping Duty

Why in News

Recently, the government has decided **not to impose Anti-Dumping Duty (ADD) on imports of certain copper products, from China, Thailand, Korea and three other countries.**

Key Points

- **About:**
 - In April, **Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)** recommended imposing the duty on “**copper and copper alloy flat-rolled products**” from China, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, after conducting a probe.
 - However, the **Ministry of Finance takes the final call** to impose these duties and issues notification for the same.
- **Anti Dumping Duty (Concept):**
 - **Dumping:**
 - Dumping is said to occur **when the goods are exported by a country to another country at a price lower than the price it normally charges** in its own home market.

- This is an **unfair trade practice** which can have a distortive effect on international trade.
- **Objective:**
 - Imposition of Anti-dumping duty is a **measure to rectify the situation arising out of the dumping of goods** and its trade distortive effect.
 - In the long-term, anti-dumping duties **can reduce the international competition of domestic companies** producing similar goods.
 - It is a **protectionist tariff** that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
 - The use of anti-dumping measures as an instrument of fair competition is **permitted by the World Trade Organisation**.
- **Different from Countervailing Duties:**
 - ADD is a customs duty on imports providing a protection against the dumping of goods at prices substantially lower than the normal value whereas **Countervailing duty is a customs duty on goods that have received government subsidies** in the originating or exporting country.
- **WTO's Provisions Related to Anti-Dumping Duty:**
 - **Validity:** An anti-dumping duty is **valid for a period of five years** from the date of imposition unless revoked earlier.
 - **Sunset Review:** It can be **extended for a further period of five years** through a sunset or expiry review investigation.
 - A Sunset review/ expiry review is an evaluation of the need for the continued existence of a program or an agency. It allows for an assessment of the effectiveness and performance of the program or agency.
 - Such a review can be initiated suo moto or on the basis of a duly substantiated request received from or on behalf of the domestic industry.

Directorate General of Trade Remedies

- It is the **apex national authority under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry** for administering all trade remedial measures including anti-dumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures.
- It **provides trade defence support to the domestic industry and exporters** in dealing with increasing instances of trade remedy investigations instituted against them by other countries.

7. Output Pact: OPEC+

Why in News

Recently, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pushed back against a plan by the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) Plus** group to extend the global pact to cut oil production beyond April 2022.

Key Points

- **The Output Pact & Fluctuating Oil Price:**
 - The OPEC+ group of countries had, in April 2020, entered into a **two-year agreement (Output Pact)**, which entailed steep cuts in crude production to deal with a sharp fall in the price of oil as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - The price of **Brent crude** hit an **18-year low of under USD 20 per barrel in April 2020** as economic activity around the world crashed as countries dealt with the pandemic.
 - In **November 2020**, the prices started rising and in **July 2021**, they were **USD 76.5 per barrel** mainly due to the steady rollout of **vaccination programmes around the world**.
 - OPEC+, however, **maintained lower levels of production** despite crude oil prices reaching pre-Covid levels, with Saudi Arabia, notably, announcing a further cut in production of 1 million barrels per day for the February-to-April period, which **helped boost rising prices even further**.
 - The OPEC+ group ran into **sharp criticism from developing economies, including India**, for deliberately maintaining low supply levels to raise prices.
 - In April, OPEC+ agreed to gradually increase crude production, including a **phased end to Saudi Arabia's 1 million barrel per day cut in production by July**.
- **UAE's Objection:**
 - UAE agreed that there was a need to increase crude oil production from August 2021, but did not agree to a condition by the **OPEC Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC)** that the **two-year production agreement be extended by six months**.
 - The UAE's key objection to the existing agreement is the **reference output used to calculate the total production apportioned to each oil-exporting country**.
 - The **baseline production level reference** used in the current agreement was **not reflective of the UAE's production capacity**

and, therefore, led to the UAE being apportioned a lower share of total production of crude oil.

- UAE would be open to extending the agreement if baseline production levels were reviewed to be fair to all parties.
- **Impact of OPEC+ conflict on India:**
 - **Delayed Relief:**
 - If the UAE and other OPEC+ nations do not reach an agreement to increase production in August, **expected relief in the form of lower crude oil prices could be delayed.**
 - **High Domestic Prices:**
 - India is currently **facing record-high prices of petrol and diesel.** High crude prices have led to **Indian oil marketing companies hiking the price of petrol by about 19.3%** and that of diesel by about 21% since the beginning of 2021.
 - **Slow Recovery:**
 - The high price of crude oil was **slowing down the economic recovery of developing economies post the pandemic.**
 - **Inflation:**
 - The high prices might also increase the **Current Account Deficit** and put **inflationary pressure** on the Indian economy.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

- **About:**
 - It is a **permanent, intergovernmental organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960**, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.
 - It aims **to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil in the world market**, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- **Headquarter:**
 - Vienna, Austria.
- **Membership:**
 - OPEC membership is **open to any country** that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.
 - **OPEC has a total of 14 Member Countries** viz. Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Angola, Ecuador and Venezuela are members of OPEC.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Plus

- It is a loosely affiliated entity consisting of the **OPEC members and 10 of the world's major non-OPEC oil-exporting nations which are:**
 - Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Blue Heart Campaign is India's anti-trafficking program.
2. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a legally binding declaration to prohibit slavery.

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 : D

Explanation

- 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. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- The **Blue Heart Campaign** is an **international anti-trafficking program** started by the UNODC. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- 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).

2. With reference to the Rabha Tribe, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Rabhas are a tribe from Assam.
2. Bagurumba is a folk dance in Assam which is performed by the Rabhas.

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Rabhas are Scheduled Tribes in Assam.
- While Bagurumba is a folk dance in Assam, it is performed by the Bodos.
- Hamja is a folk dance performed by the Rabha tribes.
- The Hamja Dance is about paddy cultivation.
- Baikho Dera is the main festival of Rabhas.

3. Which of the following statements best describes the “Harit Dhara”?

- A It is a programme launched to create awareness regarding the harmful impacts of monoculture.
- B It is a feed supplement developed to cut down methane emissions by cattle.
- C It is an initiative for rejuvenation of land which is deteriorated by overgrazing of cattle.
- D It is aimed at developing and conserving indigenous breeds of bovine population.

Answer : B

Explanation

- The **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.
- 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.
- **Hence, option B is correct.**

4. The Sharda Act is one of the significant reforms initiated by the British in India. What does it deal with?

- a. Transfer of ancestral property
- b. Child marriage
- c. Remarriage of widows
- d. Prohibition of Sati & female infanticide

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Child Marriage Restraint Act was a legislative act passed by the British on 28 September 1929.
- The act fixed the marriageable age for girls at 14 years and 18 years for boys.
- It is popularly known as the Sharda Act after its sponsor, Harbilas Sarada.

5. With reference to 'Project BOLD', consider the following statements:

1. It is launched by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).
2. It seeks to create bamboo-based green patches in arid and semi-arid land zones.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- Recently, the **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** launched a project named **Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought (BOLD)** from the village NichlaMandwa in Udaipur, Rajasthan. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Under the project 5000 saplings of special bamboo species – BambusaTulda and BambusaPolymorpha 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. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
 - 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.

6. Arrange the following rivers from west to east:

1. Ramganga

2. Gomati
3. Ghaghara
4. Gandak

Options:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

West to East: Ramganga – Gomati – Ghaghara – Gandak

Mains Practice Questions

Q1. Over the past few decades, the Dairy sector has emerged as a lifeline of the rural economy in India. However, it has become one of the most vulnerable sectors of the rural economy too. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the importance of dairy sector
- Discuss the major challenges faced by the dairy sector.
- Conclude Suitably.

Q2. Courts are sitting on a pendency bomb and it has never been more urgent to strengthen the Indian judiciary. Discuss.

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the magnitude of pendency of cases in India.
- Discuss the major reasons for pendency of cases and steps to rectify them.
- Conclude Suitably.

