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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Vacancies send a wrong signal

Context:

- The article analyzes the various **concerns associated with the appointment process to important constitutional and administration posts.**

Concerns:

Long delay in appointments:

- The article expresses concerns over the long delays in appointing people to critical posts.
  - The post of the **Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission** and the post of the **Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** was kept vacant for a long time.
  - The **retirement of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), amidst the ongoing elections** in West Bengal had resulted in a scenario where the Election Commission was left with only two members.Any disagreement on any issue between the two members would have led to a situation wherein a solution would have become difficult.
  - The National Council of Educational Research and Training, which is largely responsible for chalking out the education policy of the country has been functioning without a chief. Nearly half of the 40 Central universities are functioning without regular Vice-Chancellors.

Apprehensions over the appointment process:

- Apart from the concerns over avoidable delays in appointment to top posts, there are also concerns over the process of appointment to some of these posts.
  - One such example being **the appointment of Election Commissioners**. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) had filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court demanding the appointment of Election Commissioners by a committee rather than by the Union government.

Assigning of additional charge of multiple departments:

- Officials have been handed additional charges of multiple departments despite each being critical in their own respects.

Negative fallout:

Impact on governance:

- Leaving top posts in the government unoccupied **affects the organization's effectiveness and thus has a deleterious impact on governance in general**.

Demoralizing effect on officials:

- Delays in promotions and appointments also tend to demoralize the officials who await promotions after vacancies arise.

Questions on the credibility of important institutions:

- The lack of a consultative process in the appointment to Election Commission give rise to chances of potential executive interference in their functioning and thus **adversely impacts the perception of neutrality** of this important institution in a democracy like India.

Impact on performance of the institutions:

- The handing of additional charges of multiple departments to a single person will have an adverse impact on the efficiency of such departments given the lack of attention that such departments would receive from the appointed head.

Recommendations:

Time bound process:

- Appointments to higher echelons must be announced well in time. A time frame needs to be worked out to **announce top appointments at least a month in advance** and the nominee should be enabled to take charge soon after the retirement of the predecessor. This will help **avoid any interregnum.**

Well laid guidelines:

- **Well laid guidelines for promotion will help keep out political considerations from the appointment process.** This will **help increase the**

transparency in the appointment process which will only augur more respect for the institutions involved.

Broadbasing appointment process:

- For appointment to top constitutional posts the process should be **made more consultative.**
- For example in the case of appointment of Election Commissioners, the recommendations of the Law Commission can act as a way forward. The Law Commission, its report of March 2015, held that it was "imperative" that the appointment became a "consultative process," given the "importance of maintaining the neutrality" of the ECI and shielding the CEC and Election Commissioners "from executive interference."
- The Law Commission had made two specific recommendations.
  - The **appointment of all the Election Commissioners (including the CEC) should be made by the President in consultation with a three-member collegium or selection committee**, consisting of Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha in terms of numerical strength) and Chief Justice of India.
  - **The elevation of an Election Commissioner should be on the basis of seniority**, unless the collegium or the committee, for reasons to be recorded in writing, finds such Commissioner unfit.
- The article suggests further expanding the proposed high-powered committee given the limited powers that the Opposition leader has in the selection process.

2. 'Super censorship': MPs' panel grills Ministry

Context:

- The Standing Committee on Information and Technology has questioned the officials of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on the **draft Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021.**

Background:

- The draft Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021 proposes amendments aimed at tackling the menace of piracy and also introduces some **changes with respect to the process of certification.**
  - The amendment would grant **revisionary powers to the Government** on account of violation of Section 5B(1) of the Act.

- **Section 5B(1)** states that a film shall not be certified for public exhibition if, in the opinion of the authority competent to grant the certificate, the film or any part of it is against the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or involves defamation or contempt of court or is likely to incite the commission of any offence.
  - Also, the Central Government may, if it considers it necessary so to do, **direct the Chairman of the Board to re-examine the film.**
- The Bill has been placed in the public domain and called for public comments.

Concerns:

Super censorship:

- Some prominent filmmakers have criticized the bill over the **provision that allows the government to order recertification of films already certified by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).** They have called it a kind of "super censorship".

Unnecessary concentration of power:

- The government's move to allow it the power to ask for recertification amounts to unnecessary concentration of such powers especially when there are already existing penal provisions in this regard.
  - If any person or group feels that a film or part of it hurts their sentiment or imperils the country, it can be challenged in the judiciary.

Against Judicial orders:

- The High Court of Karnataka in **KM Shankarappa Vs. Union of India** case stated that the Central Government **cannot exercise revisional powers in respect of films that are already certified by the Board.** This has also been upheld by the Supreme Court.
- The proposed amendments run contrary to the above judicial precedents.

Counter arguments:

Reasonable restriction upon freedom of speech and expression:

- The government's stand has been that the proposed amendments derive their standing from **Article 19(2) of the Constitution** which are non-negotiable.

- Article 19(2) of the Constitution imposes **reasonable restrictions upon the freedom of speech and expression** in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement of any offence.

Help deal with violation of Section 5B(1):

- Sometimes complaints are received against a film that allude to violation of Section 5B(1) of the Cinematograph Act, 1952 after a film is certified. The new amendments would help deal with such cases.

Check on arbitrary use of powers:

- The government's stand is that the **Ministry itself will have no powers to censor any film**, but it will only allow the Ministry to return the film for recertification.
- The government has also stated that such a **clause would be invoked only when the content of a film impinged on the security and integrity of the nation**, this would act as a restriction against the arbitrary use of such powers.

Power of the legislature to legislate new laws:

- The Legislature may, in certain cases, overrule or nullify the judicial or executive decision by enacting appropriate legislation.

3. Bengal passes resolution to set up Council

Context:

- The **West Bengal Assembly has passed a resolution to set up a Legislative Council** with a two-thirds majority.

Details:

- The resolution for the Legislative Council was moved **under Article 169.**

Article 169:

- Article 169 of the Indian Constitution deals with the abolition or creation of Legislative Councils in states.

- Clause (1) states that **Parliament may by law provide** for the abolition of the Legislative Council of a State having such a Council or for the creation of such a Council in a State having no such Council, if the **Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution** to that effect by a majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by **a majority of not less than two thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting.**
- Clause (3) states that such a law shall be deemed to be **an amendment of the Constitution for the purposes of Article 368.**

4. 'Tele-law services empowering voiceless'

Context:

- The recent event to mark the coverage of more than **nine lakh beneficiaries of the government's tele-law scheme.**

Background:

Tele-law:

- Through this initiative, the **Department of Justice has partnered with NALSA and CSC e-Governance Service India Limited** for mainstreaming legal aid to the marginalised communities through Common Services Center (CSC).
- Tele-Law means the **use of communications and information technology for the delivery of legal information and advice**. This e-interaction between lawyers and people would be through the video-conferencing infrastructure available at the CSCs.
- The concept of Tele-Law is to facilitate the delivery of legal advice through a panel of lawyers stationed at the State Legal Services Authorities (SALSA) and CSC. The project initiates to connect citizens with lawyers through telephone and video conferencing facilities by the **Para-Legal Volunteers** stationed at identified 50,000 CSCs.
- Presently, the tele-law programme is operational in 633 districts.

Significance:

- It will help provide **access to affordable and quality legal advice** across the country including those in the rural areas.
- By improving access to legal advice for women, the facility could also become a source of **gender justice and empowerment.**

- Tele-law has the potential to **foster inclusive justice delivery and strengthening rule of law across the country.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

5. Panel on Naga issue to meet on July 9

Background:

For comprehensive coverage of the Naga insurgency issue refer to:

Naga Insurgency

Details:

- In the light of the stalemate in the peace agreement talks between the Centre and the Naga extremist groups, the Nagaland state government had set up a parliamentary committee headed by the Chief Minister to pursue and resolve the long-pending Naga political issue.
- The core committee of this parliamentary panel is scheduled to meet soon.

6. Unpacking China's game plan

Context:

- Reports of **China upgrading its aviation defence infrastructure in the Tibetan plateau**

Background:

India's superiority in air power:

- India exhibited firmness in their resolve to thwart Chinese attempts to violate the status Quo along the LAC. This firmness was backed by IAF superiority along the LAC.
- India enjoyed certain advantages vis-a-vis airpower as compared to the Chinese.

- **India has a string of airfields all along the foothills of the Himalayas**. This offers the IAF higher strike potential. On the contrary Chinese airfields in Tibet were few, widely spaced out and hence not mutually supportive. Also this led to **large gaps in their air defence structure** that could have been utilized by the IAF to interdict targets.
- **The Indian airfields are situated at lower altitudes. This permits the aircrafts taking off from these airfields to carry a full armament load**. On the contrary, most Tibetan airfields are at altitudes above 10,000 ft, severely restricting the payload of PLAAF aircraft.
- The positive asymmetry of IAF proved to be detrimental to China's plans to gain any territorial advantage.

Details:

- The recent high-resolution satellite photos have revealed rapid **upgradation of airfield and air defence infrastructure by China along the LAC.**
  - China has made rapid progress in construction of hardened aircraft shelters and new runways.
  - China has positioned **new air defence radars and missile systems** along the LAC thus providing itself the comfort of a layered air defence setting.

Concerns:

Chinese tactical attempt to buy time:

- The article also suggests the possibility of a link between the Chinese construction activities and the procrastination by China in the talks for reducing tensions in Eastern Ladakh. **The temporary offer of talks seems to be a tactical attempt by the Chinese to buy time to upgrade their air defence infrastructure.**

Strategy of denial:

- By strengthening their air defence architecture, the Chinese are trying to deter India through a **strategy of denial, i.e., to dissuade the IAF to attack China over fears of loss of aircrafts or personnel that could be caused by the missile systems of China.**

Nullify advantages enjoyed by India:

- This move by China could alter the current balance of air power between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in the medium to long term. This could nullify the advantage that India enjoys

vis-a-vis airpower along the LAC. **India may lose the trump card of positive air power asymmetry** that it now holds which would reduce India's stand in future negotiations.

Way forward:

- India needs to closely **monitor the air defence upgradation drive of China** and make relevant changes to its own strategies.
- India's posture and demands at the talks must reflect its understanding of China's devious attempt to buy time in the name of talks

7. E-waste disposal: L-G seeks means to integrate unorganised sector

Context:

- Delhi Lieutenant-Governor recently chaired a review meeting related to e-waste management in the city.

E-waste management:

- Need to ensure **scientific, efficient and environmentally safe disposal of all types of electronic waste.**
- Setting up of **e-waste processing units** should be prioritized.
- A suitable institutional mechanism should be devised to suitably **integrate the unorganised sector that includes traditional kabaadi walas, ragpickers and NGOs in e-waste collection and processing.**
- Closer coordination with the important stakeholder ministries and stakeholders could provide more effective outcomes.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Water wars of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

An ongoing jala jagadam (fight over water resources), as it has been described by regional media, once again drew the police forces of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana into a tense standoff over release of water from the Nagarjuna Sagar reservoir.

Krishna River Dispute

- Both states have disagreements over the sharing of the Krishna River water continue to shape politics in the region.
- AP alleges that Telangana has been drawing Krishna water from four projects — Jurala, Srisailam, Nagarjuna Sagar, and Pulichintala without approvals from the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB).
- The KRMB an autonomous body that was set up after the bifurcation of the state, to manage and regulate the waters in the Krishna basin.

What is the issue?

- The water that is used for power generation, Andhra says, is being wasted by releasing it into the Bay of Bengal, even as farmers in the Krishna delta ayacut are yet to begin sowing of the kharif crop.
- Telangana says it would continue with the hydropower generation to meet its requirements of power.
- At the same time, it has taken strong exception to the irrigation projects of the Andhra Pradesh government, especially the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Project (RLIP), which it claims is illegal.
- Telangana has called for a 50:50 allocation of water from the Krishna River.

How is the water split between the states currently?

- After Telangana was carved out of Andhra Pradesh, the two states agreed to split the water share 66:34 on an ad hoc basis until the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-2 decided the final allocation.

Why is Telangana making the big hydel push?

- The Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project that was inaugurated in 2019 requires a huge amount of power to draw water from the Godavari River.
- Also, the Telangana government says that it needs hydel energy to power its Nettempadu, Bheema, Koilsagar and Kalwakurthy lift irrigation projects.
- Despite protests by Andhra, the Telangana CM has chosen to operate all hydel power stations at full capacity because hydel power is cheaper, and imposes a smaller burden on the already stretched state budget.

What is the solution to the disagreement, then?

- Telangana wants the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-2 to permanently settle the water dispute.
- In the meantime, it wants the KRMB to convene a full-fledged board meeting on a mutually agreed date this month to address its grievances against Andhra Pradesh.

What political factors are at play behind the dispute?

- The two CMs have maintained cordial relations and have even met on several occasions to discuss long-standing issues arising out of the bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh.
- Critics have, however, alleged that the two CMs are fanning regional sentiments purely for political gains.

2. Tele-Law

Why in News

Recently, the Justice Department commemorated the **milestone of crossing 9 lakh beneficiaries** under its **Tele-Law programme** through **Common Service Centres.**

- **Common Services Centre (CSC) programme** is an initiative of the **Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)**, that serves as the **access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India**, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

Key Points

- **About:**

- o It was **launched by the Ministry of Law and Justice in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in 2017** to address cases at the pre–litigation stage.
- o It is presently operating in **633 districts** (including 115 **Aspirational Districts**) across 34 States/UTs through a network of **50,000 CSCs.**
- o Under this programme, **smart technology of video conferencing, telephone/instant calling facilities available** at the vast network of Common Service Centres at the Panchayat level are used to connect the indigent, down-trodden, vulnerable, unreached groups and communities with the Panel Lawyers for seeking timely and valuable legal advice.
- o Even though the Tele-law programme is technology driven, its success is dependent on the working of field functionaries comprising **Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs), Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs), State Coordinators and Panel Lawyers.**

- ▪ **Benefits:**
  - o It enables anyone to **seek legal advice without wasting precious time and money.** The service is free for those who are eligible for free legal Aid as mentioned under **Section 12 of the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987.** For all others a nominal fee is charged.
  - o According to a recent report titled **'Quality of Legal Representation: An Empirical Analysis of Free Legal Aid Services in India'**, the majority of the people who are entitled to the free legal aid system see the service as an option only when they cannot afford a private lawyer.
- ▪ **Supports SDGs:**
  - o It can be noted that this initiative is in line with **Sustainable Development Goal-16**, which seeks to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

Legal Services Authorities (LSA) Act

- ▪ **In 1987, the Legal Services Authorities (LSA) Act was enacted to give free and competent legal services to the poor** and paved the way for the constitution of **National Legal Service Authority (NALSA)** and other legal service institutions at the State, district and taluka level.
  - o NALSA along with other Legal Services Institutions conducts **Lok Adalats**. Lok Adalat is one of the alternative dispute redressal mechanisms, it is a forum where disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage are settled/ compromised amicably.
- ▪ Free legal services under LSA Act are available to a person belonging to **Schedule Tribe** and **Schedule Caste,** woman, child, victim of human

trafficking, differently abled person, industrial workman, and person in custody in a protective home and the poor.

Related Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 39A** of the Constitution provides for **free legal aid to poor and weaker sections of the society**, to promote justice on the basis of equal opportunity.
- **Articles 14 and 22(1)** also make it **obligatory for the State to ensure equality before the law.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

3. How India can face the tidal wave of marine plastic

The problem of marine plastic pollution has reached a new peak. Hence it must be tackled from various perspectives. This article discusses some of them.

Plastic use in India

- The Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) Annual Report on Implementing the Plastic Garbage Rules, 2016, is the only regular estimate of the quantum of plastic waste generated in India.
- According to it, the waste generated in 2018-19 was 3,360,043 tonnes per year (roughly 9,200 tonnes per day).
- Given that total municipal solid waste generation is between 55 and 65 million tonnes per day, plastic waste contributes about 5-6 per cent of total solid waste generated in India.

What happens to Plastic Waste?

- Only nine per cent of all plastic waste has ever been recycled.
- Approximately 12 per cent has been burnt, while the remaining 79 per cent has accumulated in landfills.
- Plastic waste is blocking our sewers, threatening marine life and generating health risks for residents in landfills or the natural environment.

Marine plastic pollution

- Incredibly vast and deep, the ocean acts as a huge sink for global pollution. Some of the plastic in the ocean originates from ships that lose cargo at sea.
- Abandoned plastic fishing nets and longlines – known as ghost gear – is also a large source, making up about 10% of plastic waste at sea.
- Marine aquaculture contributes to the problem, too, mainly when the polystyrene foam that's used to make the floating frames of fish cages makes its way into the sea.
- The financial costs of marine plastic pollution are significant as well.
- According to conservative forecasts made in March 2020, the direct harm to the blue economy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will be $2.1 billion per year.

Threats posed to coastal areas

- Enormous social costs accompany these economic costs.
- Residents of coastal regions suffer from the harmful health impacts of plastic pollution and waste brought in by the tides and are inextricably linked to the fishing and tourism industry for their livelihoods.
- Therefore, we must begin finding solutions to prevent plastics and other waste from polluting our oceans and clean them up.

Tackling the issue

The problem of marine plastic pollution can — and must — be tackled from a range of perspectives. Some of the solutions are as follows:

1.Designing a product: Identifying plastic items that can be replaced with non-plastic, recyclable, or biodegradable materials is the first step. Find alternatives to single-use plastics and reusable design goods by working with product designers.

2.Pricing: Plastics are inexpensive because they are made with substantially subsidized oil and may be produced at a lower cost, with fewer economic incentives to employ recycled plastics.

3.Technologies and Innovation: Developing tools and technology to assist governments and organizations in measuring and monitoring plastic garbage in cities. **'Closing the loop' project** of the UN assists cities in developing more inventive policy solutions to tackle the problem. A similar approach can be adopted in India.

4.Promoting a plastic-free workplace: All catering operations should be prohibited from using single-use plastics. To encourage workers and clients to improve their

habits, all single-use goods can be replaced with reusable items or more sustainable alternatives.

5.Producer responsibility: Extended responsibility can be applied in the retail (packaging) sector, where producers are responsible for collecting and recycling products that they launch into the market.

6.Municipal and community actions: Beach and river clean-ups, public awareness campaigns explaining how people's actions contribute to marine plastic pollution (or how they may solve it) and disposable plastic bag bans and levies.

7.Multi-stakeholder collaboration: Government ministries at the national and local levels must collaborate in the development, implementation and oversight of policies, which includes participation from industrial firms, non-governmental organisations and volunteer organisations. Instead of acting in silos, all these stakeholders must collaborate and synchronise with one another.

Way forward

- Solving the problem of marine plastic involves a change in production and consumption habits, which would help meet the SDGs.
- Apart from the solutions mentioned above, the government can take several steps to combat plastic pollution.
- Identifying hotspots for plastic leakage can assist governments in developing effective policies that address the plastic problem directly.

4. Lambda Variant of Covid-19

Why in News

After the cases of **Delta Variant** of **Covid-19** continuously rising, a new variant called **Lambda Variant (LV)** is emerging as a new threat.

- Lambda Variant is **dominant in Peru, India has not yet reported any case of LV.**

Key Points

- **About:**
    - The **strain was first identified in Peru** in December 2020. Lambda is the dominant variant in the South American country with 81% samples found to be carrying it.

- o Until recently, it was **largely concentrated in a handful of South American countries,** including Ecuador and Argentina, but since April it has been detected in more than 25 Countries.
- o Previously known by its **Formal Scientific Name C.37,** the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** designated this variant seventh and the newest **Variant of Interest (VOI).**
  - **Another four** have been **designated as 'variants of concern'.**
- **Variant of Interest:**
  - o This means that the **genetic changes involved are predicted or known to affect transmissibility,** disease severity, or immune escape.
  - o It is also **an acknowledgement of the fact that the variant has caused significant community transmission** in multiple countries and population groups.
- **Variant of Concern:**
  - o **A variant for which there is evidence** of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.
  - o There are four – **Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta –** which have been designated as **"variants of concern",** and are considered a bigger threat.
    - These were all recently **named** after letters of the Greek alphabet to avoid linkage with the country of their origin that had been happening until then.
- **Concerns:**
  - o LV has **at least seven significant mutations in the spike protein** (the **Delta variant** has three) which could have a range of implications, including the possibility of increased transmissibility or enhanced resistance to antibodies, created either through natural infection or vaccination.
    - It is the coronavirus spike protein that binds to a human protein to initiate the process of infection.
  - o The LV has **greater infectivity than the Alpha and Gamma variants** (known to have originated in the UK and Brazil respectively).
  - o A study also reported decreased effectiveness of the **Chinese Sinovac vaccine** (Coronavac) against the Lambda variant.

Way Forward

- India, which is still recovering from the debilitating second wave, would need to proactively watch out for, and prevent the spread of any new variant that could trigger a fresh wave.

- We need a foundation of broad-based research, in universities, medical colleges and biotechnology companies, all of which must be funded, encouraged, appreciated, and talent rewarded.

5. Black Panther Spotted in Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve

Why in News

Recently, a rare **Melanistic Leopard** (commonly known as **Black Panther**) has been recorded in **Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve** (NNTR) of **Maharashtra.**

Key Points

- **Melanistic Leopard/Black Panther:**
  - **About:**

  - ☐
    - **Leopards (Panthera Pardus)** are either light colored (pale yellow to deep gold or tawny) with black rosettes or with black fur.
    - The **melanistic leopards, which are either all-black or very dark in coloration,** are known as black panthers. It is a **color variant of spotted Indian leopards,** reported from densely **forested areas of south India.**
    - Black coat coloration is **attributed to the expression of recessive alleles** in leopards and dominant alleles in jaguars. In each species, a certain combination of alleles stimulates the **production of large amounts of the dark pigment melanin (Melanism) in the animal's fur and skin.**
      - The appearance of a black coat **may be influenced by other factors, such as the angle of incident light** and the animal's life stage.
    - It is as shy as a normal leopard and very **difficult to detect.**
  - **Habitat:**
    - They are mainly in **Southwestern China, Burma, Nepal, Southern India, Indonesia,** and the southern part of **Malaysia.**
    - In India they can be spotted in the states of **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra etc.**
  - **Threats:**
    - Habitat loss.
    - Collision with vehicles.
    - Diseases.
    - Human encroachment.

- Poaching.
  - o **Protection Status:**
    - **IUCN Red List: Vulnerable.**
    - **CITES: Appendix I.**
    - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I.**

- **Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve:**

  - o **About:**
    - It is situated in **Gondia and Bhandara districts of Maharashtra.**
    - Strategically, the **Tiger Reserve is located in the heart of central Indian Tiger landscape** which contributes almost one sixth of the total tiger population of the country.
  - o **Formation:**
    - It was designated as the **46th Tiger Reserve of India** in December 2013.
    - It comprises the notified area of Navegaon National Park, Navegaon Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary, New Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary and Koka Wildlife Sanctuary.
  - o **Connectivity:**
    - NNTR has connectivity with the major tiger reserves in Central India like,
      - **Kanha** and **Pench** tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh,
      - **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger reserve** in Maharashtra,
      - Indravati Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh,
      - Indirectly with the **Kawal** and **Nagarjuna Sagar** in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and, Achanakmar Tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh.
    - It is also connected to important tiger bearing areas like **Umred-Karhandla sanctuary** and Brahampuri Division (Maharashtra).
  - o **Flora:**
    - The major forest type is **"Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest".**
    - Few thorny plants are also found and Bamboo occurs in abundance.
  - o **Fauna:**
    - **Carnivores** such as leopards and smaller carnivores like wild dogs, wolf jackals, jungle cats and also the good population of **sloth bears** are seen.
    - **Herbivore** includes Cheetal, Sambar, Nilgai, Chousingha, Barking deer, Wild pig, **Indian gaur** and Mouse deer.
    - More than **300 species of birds** have been reported from the area.
  - o **Other Protected Areas in Maharashtra:**
    - Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.
    - **Melghat Tiger reserve.**
    - Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary.

- Karnala Bird Sanctuary.
- Sanjay Gandhi National Park.
- Pench National Park.

6. Open Network for Digital Commerce

Why in News

The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** has issued orders appointing an advisory committee for its **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) project** that is **aimed at curbing "digital monopolies".**

- This is in the direction of making **e-commerce processes open source,** thus creating a platform that can be **utilised by all online retailers.**
- Earlier, the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs** released draft **e-commerce rules** for consumer protection which seek to bring changes to how e-commerce marketplaces, including Amazon and Flipkart, operate after small businesses complained that they misuse market dominance and deep-discounting to gain an unfair advantage.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - The ONDC aims at promoting open networks developed on open-sourced methodology, using open specifications and open network protocols, independent on any specific platform.
  - The project to integrate e-commerce platforms through a network based on open-source technology has been tasked to the **Quality Council of India.**
  - Implementation of ONDC, which is expected to be on the **lines of Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** could bring various operational aspects put in place by e-commerce platforms to the same level.
    - Various operational aspects include onboarding of sellers, vendor discovery, price discovery and product cataloguing etc.
  - On ONDC, buyers and sellers may transact irrespective of the fact that they are attached to one specific e-commerce portal.
- **Significance:**
  - If the ONDC gets implemented and mandated, it would mean that **all e-commerce companies** will have to operate **using the same processes** (like Android Based Mobile Devices).

- o This could give a huge booster shot to smaller online retailers and new entrants.
  - If mandated, this **could be problematic for larger e-commerce companies, which have their own processes and technology deployed** for these segments of operations.
  - o ONDC is expected to **digitise the entire value chain, standardise operations, promote inclusion** of suppliers, derive **efficiency in logistics** and enhance **value for consumers.**
- **Meaning of Open-Source:**
  - o Making a software or a process open-source means that the **code or the steps of that process is made available freely** for others to use, redistribute and modify it.
    - For example, while the operating system of **Apple's iPhones (iOS) is closed source,** meaning it cannot be legally modified or reverse engineered,
    - **Google's Android operating system is open-source,** and therefore it is possible by smartphone manufacturers such as Samsung, Xiaomi, OnePlus, etc to modify it for their hardware.
- **Government Initiatives Regarding e-Commerce in India:**
  - o **Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules 2020**
  - o **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**

E-Commerce

- Electronic commerce or e-commerce is a business model that lets firms and individuals buy and sell things over the Internet.
- Propelled by rising smartphone penetration, the launch of 4G networks and increasing consumer wealth, the Indian e-commerce market is expected to grow to **USD 200 billion by 2026.**
- The Indian e-commerce industry has been on an upward growth trajectory and is **expected to surpass the US** to become the second-largest e-commerce market in **the world by 2034.**

7. Marine Plastic: Problem, And Solution

Why in News

According to the **Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB)** Annual Report on Implementing the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**, the plastic waste generated in 2018-19 was 3.3 million tonnes per year (roughly **9,200 tonnes per day**).

Key Points

- **About:**
  - Plastic is a **synthetic organic polymer** made from petroleum with properties ideally suited for a wide variety of applications, including packaging, building and construction, household and sports equipment, vehicles, electronics and agriculture. Plastic is cheap, lightweight, strong and malleable.
  - Over **300 million tons of plastic** are produced every year, half of which is used to design **single-use items** such as shopping bags, cups and straws.
  - Only **9% of plastic waste is recycled.** Approximately 12% is burnt, while 79% has accumulated in landfills.
  - According to the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, at least **8 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year.**
- **Sources of Marine Plastic:**
  - The main sources of marine plastic are **land-based**, from urban and storm runoff, sewer overflows, beach visitors, inadequate waste disposal and management, industrial activities, construction and illegal dumping.
  - **Ocean-based plastic** originates mainly from the **fishing industry, nautical activities and aquaculture.**
  - Under the influence of **solar UV radiation**, wind, currents and other natural factors, plastic fragments into small particles, termed **microplastics** (particles smaller than 5 mm) or nanoplastics (particles smaller than 100 nm).
    - In addition, **microbeads**, a type of microplastic, are very tiny pieces of manufactured polyethylene plastic that are added as exfoliants in health and beauty products, such as cleansers and toothpastes. These tiny particles easily pass through water filtration systems and end up in the ocean and lakes.
- **Concerns of Marine Plastic Waste:**
  - Plastic waste **blocks our sewers, threatening marine life** and generating health risks for residents in landfills or the natural environment.
  - The **financial costs of marine plastic** pollution are significant as well.
    - According to a forecast made in March 2020, the **direct harm to the blue economy** of the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** will be USD 2.1 billion per year.
  - **Enormous social costs** accompany these economic costs. Residents of coastal regions suffer from the **harmful health impacts of plastic pollution** and waste brought in by the tides.

- o Boats may become entangled in abandoned or discarded fishing nets or their engines may become blocked with plastic debris.
  - It can create problems for industries such as **Shipping, fisheries and aquaculture and maritime tourism** which affect livelihood of the coastal community.
- ▪ **Steps Taken So Far:**
  - o **GloLitter Partnerships Project:**
    - It is launched by the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** and the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** and . initial funding from the **Government of Norway.**
    - **Aim:** To prevent and **reduce marine plastic litter** from shipping and fisheries.
      - It will also **assist developing countries in reducing marine** litter, including plastic litter, from within the maritime transport and fisheries sectors, and to decrease the use of plastics in these industries.
      - Also assist in identifying opportunities to **reuse and recycle plastics.**
    - **30 countries including India** have joined this global initiative to tackle marine litter.
  - o **World Environment Day, 2018** hosted in India, the world leaders vowed to **"Beat Plastic Pollution" & eliminate its use completely.**
  - o **Specific to India:**
    - **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016** state that every local body has to be responsible for setting up infrastructure for segregation, collection, processing, and disposal of plastic waste.
    - **Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2018** introduced the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
    - **Ban on Single-Use Plastics** in a bid to free India of single-use plastics by 2022.
- ▪ **Solutions:**
  - o **Designing a product:** Identifying plastic items that can be replaced with non-plastic, recyclable, or biodegradable materials is the first step.
    - Countries must embrace **circular and sustainable economic practices** throughout the plastics value chain to accomplish this.
  - o **Pricing:** Plastics are inexpensive which provide **fewer economic incentives to** employ recycled plastics. Balancing price structure with environmental health should be a priority.
  - o **Technologies and Innovation:** Developing tools and technology to assist governments in measuring and monitoring plastic garbage in cities.

- India should start projects like the **'Closing the loop'** project of the **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific which** assists cities in developing more inventive policy solutions to tackle the problem.
    o **Promoting a plastic-free workplace:** All single-use goods can be replaced with reusable items or more sustainable single-use alternatives.
    o **Producer responsibility: Extended responsibility** can be applied in the retail (packaging) sector, where producers are responsible for collecting and recycling products that they launch into the market.
    o **Municipal and community actions:** Beach and river clean-ups, public awareness campaigns and disposable plastic bag bans and levies.
    o **Multi-stakeholder collaboration:** Government ministries at the national and local levels must collaborate in the development, implementation and oversight of policies related to plastic waste management.

Central Pollution Control Board

- CPCB is a statutory organisation which was constituted in September, 1974 under **the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.**
- It was entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.**
- It also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change of the provisions of the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- Principal Functions of the CPCB, as spelt out in the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:
    o to promote cleanliness of streams and wells in different areas of the States by prevention, control and abatement of water pollution.
    o to improve the quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements about Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair:

1. He had served as a President of the Indian National Congress.
2. Sankaran Nair was an advocate who defended Bhagat Singh.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

1. 1 only
2. 2 only
3. Both
4. None

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair served as a President of the Indian National Congress in 1897.
- He was the advocate who fought against the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, Michael O'Dwyer for the atrocities at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- He served as a judge of the Madras High Court.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. An Aurora is a display of light in the sky only seen in the Northern Hemisphere of Earth.
2. Auroras are caused when charged particles ejected from the Sun's surface enter the Earth's atmosphere.

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

- An **Aurora is a display of light** in the sky **predominantly seen in the high latitude regions (Arctic and Antarctic).** It is also known as a Polar light.
    - They commonly occur at **high northern and southern latitudes,** less frequent at mid-latitudes, and seldom seen near the equator. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- While usually a milky greenish color, auroras can also show red, blue, violet, pink, and white. These colors appear in a variety of continuously changing shapes.
- Auroras are not just **something that happens on Earth. If a planet has an atmosphere and magnetic field,** they probably have auroras.
- Auroras are caused when charged particles **ejected from the Sun's surface** - called the solar wind - enter the Earth's atmosphere. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The typical aurora is caused by collisions between charged particles from space with the oxygen and nitrogen in Earth's upper atmosphere.
- The electrons - which come from the Earth's magnetosphere, the region of space controlled by Earth's magnetic field - transfer their energy to the oxygen and nitrogen atoms and molecules, making them "excited".
- When a large number of electrons come from the magnetosphere to bombard the atmosphere, the oxygen and nitrogen can emit enough light for the eye to detect, giving us beautiful auroral displays.
- In the northern part of our globe, the polar lights are called aurora borealis or Northern Lights, and are seen from the US (Alaska), Canada, Iceland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.
- In the south, they are called aurora australis or southern lights, and are visible from high latitudes in Antarctica, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia.

3. With reference to Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. OPEC has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. Venezuela is the only country from South America which is part of OPEC.

Options:

a. 1 only

b. 2 only
c. Both
d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- OPEC is an acronym for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in September 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
- OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. Due to Switzerland not extending diplomatic assurances, this was moved to Vienna, Austria, in 1965.
- Venezuela is the only country from South America which is part of OPEC.

4. Harit Dhara Feed Supplement developed by ICAR can be used for which of the following purposes?

- a. Cut down cattle methane emissions
- b. Improve carbohydrate fermentation
- c. Promote digestion in Cattle
- d. Prevent microbial diseases in cattle

Answer : a

Harit Dhara Feed Supplement

- 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 CO_2 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.

5. **Consider the following statements:**

   1. The Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) framework is an initiative of the G20 countries.
   2. India is yet to join the Multilateral Instrument (MLI) to prevent base erosion and profit shifting.

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

- The **Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)** inclusive framework is an **OECD initiative, approved by the G20,** to identify ways of providing more standardised tax rules globally. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- **India has ratified** the **Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty** Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting **("Multilateral Instrument" or "MLI")** - outcome of the OECD/G20 Project to tackle BEPS. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

6. **Consider the following statements with respective to Common Palm Civets**

   1. They are native to regions within and around Asia, ranging as far east as the Philippines and as far west as Kashmir.
   2. It is listed as Critically Endangered under IUCN Red list.

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

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

Answer : b

Common Palm Civets

- The common palm civet is a small mammal belonging to the family Viverridae.
- According to the IUCN, Asian palm civets are of little concern because they have a wide distribution, large populations, are highly adaptable, and have a stable population trend.
- Their long, stocky body is covered with coarse, shaggy hair that is usually grey in colour.
- It is thought to lead a solitary lifestyle, except for brief periods during mating.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country. Critically examine. (250 Words)

Approach

- Briefly define communalism.
- Highlight why communalization occurs in India.
- Highlight how communalization threatens Indian democracy.
- Prescribe some measure to overcome the challenges posed by communalism.

2Q. Media is dubbed as the fourth pillar of democracy. In the context, discuss the significance of media ethics in contemporary times. (150 words)

Approach

- Highlight the growing importance of media in a democracy.
- Highlight some ethical issues currently faced by the media towards jeopardising democracy.
- Conclude by highlighting the need of media ethics and suggest some measures for its implementation.