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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. The bar on criticism that muzzles the advocate

Bar council of India

- It was established by Parliament under the Advocates Act, 1961.

Functions:

- To lay down standards of professional conduct and etiquette for advocates.
- To lay down the procedure to be followed by its disciplinary committee and the disciplinary committees of each State Bar Council.
- To safeguard the rights, privileges and interests of advocates.
- To promote and support law reform.
- To promote legal education and to lay down standards of legal education. This is done in consultation with the Universities in India imparting legal education and the State Bar Councils.
- To recognise Universities whose degree in law shall be a qualification for enrolment as an advocate. The Bar Council of India visits and inspects Universities, or directs the State Bar Councils to visit and inspect Universities for this purpose.

Context

- The Bar Council of India (BCI) has introduced changes in the rules that govern the professional conduct and etiquette of advocates.
- The objective of these amendments is to improve the Standards of Professional Conduct.

Details

- The notification said an Advocate shall conduct himself/herself as a gentleman/gentle lady in his/her day to day life and he/she shall not do any unlawful act.
- He/she shall not make any statement in the Print, Electronic or Social Media, which is indecent or derogatory, defamatory or motivated, malicious or mischievous against any Court or Judge or any member of Judiciary, or against State Bar Council or Bar Council of India.

- Nor shall any Advocate engaged in any willful violation, disregard or defiance of any resolution or order of the State Bar Council or Bar Council of India and any such act/conduct shall amount to misconduct.

Penalty for rule violation

- The act of criticism shall result in suspension or removal of membership of such members from the Bar Council.
- Advocates who violate the rules can be disqualified from contesting in bar association or council elections for any period of time, “depending on the gravity of the misconduct”.

Exception

- However, the notification clarified that a healthy and bonafide criticism made in good faith, shall not be treated as a “misconduct”.

Temporary hold

- After the amendments were notified cases were filed in various high courts questioning the changes.
- It is currently being reviewed by a committee comprising senior advocates, members of bar associations and the Bar Council of India.
- The amendments also require the Chief Justice of India’s approval before coming into effect, which has not yet been obtained.

Concerns

- These rules run counter to constitutional guarantees of free speech and the freedom of profession.
- This will have a debilitating impact on the advocates and their careers could be in trouble.

Conclusion

- Advocates are the torch bearers of change and question the redundant practices prevalent in the justice delivery system. Therefore, before such rules are considered it has to be reviewed, as such rules may have a chilling effect on freedom of speech.

2. Judges should not act like emperors, says SC

Context:

The Supreme Court said that the judges should not behave like emperors and summon government officials instantly without a good reason.

Details:

- The SC bench noticed that a practice had developed in certain High Courts to call officers **instantly to exert direct or indirect pressure**.
- The SC has prescribed modesty and humility to judges by asking them **not to cross the line of separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive** and call officers to court unnecessarily.
- It observed that summoning of officers frequently is not appreciable at all and it is liable to be condemned in the strongest words.
- It noted that at times, when officials have to travel great distances and wait for hours in court, their **official work was delayed**, creating an **extra burden on the officer**.
- It argued that the courts have the power of the pen, which is more effective than the presence of an officer in Court. If any particular issue arises for consideration before the Court, and the advocate representing the State is not able to answer, **it is advised to write such doubt in the order and give time to the State or its officers to respond**.

3. Terrain, facilities will affect delimitation in J&K, says ECI

Context:

Delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir.

J&K delimitation exercise:

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing the boundaries of a constituency that votes for a Lok Sabha seat on the **basis of population change over a period of time**.
- In the **erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir** (prior to August 5, 2019), the **delimitation of Lok Sabha seats was governed by the Indian Constitution**, but the **delimitation of its Assembly seats was governed separately by the**

Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.

- **Jammu and Kashmir was kept out of the delimitation exercise** when it was carried out in the rest of the country between **2002-2008**.
- **After the abrogation of Article 370** on August 5, 2019, **Jammu and Kashmir lost its special status and became a Union Territory.**
- **A delimitation commission was constituted** and asked to carve out Assembly and Parliament seats.
- Jammu and Kashmir has been **under the Centre's rule since June 19, 2018**, following the collapse of the coalition government.
- The first consequence of the completion of the delimitation exercise would be the **restoration of the political process and eventually holding assembly polls in the UT.**
- It will be only **after the completion of the delimitation exercise that the elections for the Assembly will be held.**

Details:

- The Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission will **base its final report on the 2011 Census.**
- It will take into account the **topography, difficult terrain, means of communication and convenience** available while **delimiting seven additional seats for the 83-member Assembly of the Union Territory (UT).**
 - The earlier delimitation panels did not acknowledge the difficult terrains and people's difficulties.
- The Commission will also specify the number of seats to be reserved for the SCs and the STs in the Legislative Assembly of the U.T.
 - It will be for the **first time that seats will be reserved for the STs in J&K.**
 - J&K has already seven seats reserved for SC people, mainly in the Kathua-Samba belt in the Jammu region.
 - It will be for the first time that STs, including **Bakerwals and Gujjars, will get reservations in this delimitation exercise.**
- The **24 seats reserved for Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK)** would **not be delimited** in this process.

4. A perception shift in relations between Sri Lanka and China?

Context:

China is coming under increasing public scrutiny in Sri Lanka.

China's assistance to Sri Lanka:

- China has topped the charts in **providing crucial and timely support for Sri Lanka**.
- In addition to sanctioning loans and a **currency swap facility worth more than \$2 billion since the pandemic struck**, China also announced a **\$90 million grant to Sri Lanka in October 2020**.
- China's earlier grant projects in Sri Lanka are also built as large public spaces. Eg: Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo, Nelum Pokuna Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre.
- Former President Maithripala Sirisena had requested China for the grant and the China-Sri Lanka Friendship Hospital facility was built within 30 months.
 - The hospital is built with a **Chinese grant of \$60 million** and is said to be one of the largest in South Asia for nephrology care.

Details:

- China is under more public scrutiny in the island nation than ever before. **The growing scepticism of China, in public discourse and the media, is relatively new.**
- The sentiment came to the fore when the Sri Lankan government passed a controversial bill governing the China-backed Colombo Port City.
- Recently, controversies erupted over **signboards in public places and government offices that included mandarin while excluding Tamil**, a national language in Sri Lanka.

What has changed in how Sri Lankans perceive their country's relationship with China?

- Sri Lanka has maintained friendly relations with maritime nations, including China, since ancient times. **Such relations have always had a sense of strategic content.**
- However, the **traditional friendship between Sri Lanka and China** has now become more nuanced with unique, unprecedented characteristics in the bilateral relationship, **displaying a special partnership**, especially at the level of two governments.
- While the **port city is a good investment for Sri Lanka**, many in the island nation see it as a **Chinese colony**.
- The port city bill was passed **without discussions with all domestic stakeholders and consensus**.

Conclusion:

- The Tamils in Sri Lanka acknowledge India's geopolitical concerns. They are of the sentiment that **India is immediate family and China is a distant relative.**
- Opposition parties in Sri Lanka assert that China must **acknowledge the Tamils** and also that **Sri Lanka is a diverse country with different ethnic and religious groups, not an entirely Sinhala-Buddhist country.**

5. Cooperation Ministry will usurp States' rights: Oppn.

Context:

A new **Ministry of Co-operation** has been created.

Details:

- A separate 'Ministry of Co-operation' has been created by the government for realizing the **vision of 'Sahkar se Samriddhi'**.
- This ministry will provide a **separate administrative, legal and policy framework for strengthening the cooperative movement in the country.**
- The Ministry will work to **streamline processes for 'Ease of doing business' for co-operatives** and enable the **development of Multi-State Co-operatives (MSCS).**
 - Significantly, the **MSCBs have now been solely taken under the Reserve Bank of India** for regulatory purposes.

Cooperative Societies:

- Cooperatives are organisations formed at the **grassroots level** by people to **harness the power of collective bargaining towards a common goal.**
- The history of cooperatives in India goes back to more than a hundred years and they continue to stay relevant due to their **grassroots reach and ability to bring economic growth to underserved sections.**

Laws governing cooperative societies:

- Cooperatives is a **State subject under entry 32 of the State List under Schedule 7** of the Constitution.
- A **majority of the cooperative societies are governed by laws in their respective states**, with a Cooperation Commissioner and the Registrar of Societies as their governing office.

- In 2002, the Centre passed a **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act** that allowed for the registration of societies with operations **in more than one state**.
 - These are mostly banks, dairies and sugar mills whose area of operation spreads across states.

Issue:

- The cooperative model has been a **source of political power** in states such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat, parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.
 - Many of these cash-rich cooperatives are controlled by Opposition parties.
- The Opposition has raised concern over the development, stating that the new ministry would hijack the **cooperative movement that currently falls under the State governments**.

6. Kerala formulates action plan for Zika

Context:

The Kerala Health Department has formulated an action plan for coordinated efforts to check the spread of Zika infection in the State.

- The department is set to launch **intensive control measures across all districts**, with a focus on mosquito control.
- The control measures will concentrate on all geographic localities where **high Aedes species density is reported**.

Zika Virus:

- Zika Virus infection is caused by the Zika Virus (ZIKV) belonging to the **Flaviviridae family**.
- It is an infection transmitted through the bite of **infected female mosquitoes, Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus**.

7. Ending the shift between Jammu and Kashmir

Durbar Move

- It is a bi-annual shifting of the Civil Secretariat and other offices of the state government from Jammu to Srinagar in summer, and vice versa in winter.
- Jammu is the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir, while Srinagar is its summer capital.

Background

- The tradition of switching the capitals twice a year is believed to have been started during Dogra rule in 1872 by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who ruled Jammu and Kashmir from 1856 until his death in 1885.
- The main aim of the Darbar Move was to escape the extreme weather conditions – Jammu’s searing heat and Srinagar’s bitter cold.
- The secretariat would function for six months each in Jammu and Srinagar.

Significance

- It helped in generating economic activity in both Jammu and Srinagar and would act as a bridge for the two culturally and linguistically different regions.
- It is generally understood that the Darbar Move was started to take the administration to the doorstep of the people of Kashmir which is closer to Ladakh. During summer, ruling from Kashmir also helped in ensuring adequate supplies to Ladakh.
- The practice also enabled greater interaction and bonding among the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

Concerns

- The exercise would cost the government nearly Rs 200 crore.
- The Jammu & Kashmir High Court in 2020 observed that there was no legal justification or constitutional basis for the Darbar Move tradition.
 - It said Darbar Move resulted in the “wastage of tremendous amount of time, efforts and energy on an inefficient and unnecessary activity.”

Context

- Governor Manoj Sinha has recently confirmed that the administration had completed the transition to e-office. Hence there was no need to continue the practice of the biennial 'Darbar Move' of the government offices.
- All officers allotted the 'Darbar Move' accommodation at Jammu and Srinagar have been asked to vacate the same.
- The decision to end the biennial 'Darbar Move' will save the exchequer Rs 200 crore each year. Government offices will now function normally at both Jammu and Srinagar.

8. State resumes immunisation against filariasis

Context:

The Maharashtra government has flagged off its mass drug administration drive for the **elimination of lymphatic filariasis**.

Details:

- Maharashtra has **18 filariasis endemic districts**.
- The Maharashtra Health Services has organised the drive in coordination with **Global Health Strategies, World Health Organization, and Project Concern International**.
- Mass drug administration is one of the **two pillars of the National Programme for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis**.
 - Under this, **anti-filaria drugs are administered to the eligible population once a year**.

Lymphatic Filariasis:

- Lymphatic Filariasis also called **elephantiasis** is a **vector-borne disease**, spread by the bite of **mosquitoes and black flies**.
- It is a parasitic disease caused by **filial worms (parasitic worms)**.
- In the human body, the disease parasite is acquired during childhood causing **gradual damage in the lymphatic system**.
- The larvae of the filial worms can live in the human body **without showing any symptoms for up to 8 years**.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

9. In defence of India's noisy democracy

Context

- The article draws a comparison between the political system prevalent in India and China. It analyses the authoritarian Chinese model of efficiency, but supports the democratic ideas and values.

China's Economic Rise

- China's economy has transformed enormously from being a poor country to a Global Powerhouse with no parallel in history.
- It has recorded high rates of economic growth, focused on capital accumulation, powered an export engine to overcome a limited domestic market, welcomed foreign direct investment, plugged into global supply chains and kept its public finances more or less in order.
- This has resulted in hundreds of millions being lifted out of poverty.

India's Development Story

- Despite impressive growth since the 1990s, it continues to be behind China in its global competitiveness.

Issue Area

- Poverty has come down, but employment prospects for the majority remain limited to low-wage informal sector jobs.
- India has fallen behind Bangladesh and Pakistan in a few social development indicators as well.

The drop in social development indicators has allowed many to question the democratic model of development; instead they have supported the Chinese model of development.

Arguments in favour of the China Model

- China is able to take decisions quickly as it is not stopped by the contradictory democratic voices. India's problem is that it is just too democratic.

Arguments against the China Model

East Asian Countries

- China's model comprises a number of key characteristics, State-guided industrial policy and finance; massive infrastructure investments; rural industrialization and openness to foreign trade and technology.
- Similar standards were also met by countries like Japan and South Korea.
 - Democratic regimes have on balance performed better.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu Model

- Kerala and Tamil Nadu have done more to improve the lives of all their citizens across castes and classes than any other State in India.
- These states have also had the longest and most sustained popular democratic movements and intense party competition in the country.

Conflict resolution

- Democracy is, slow and often contentious. But its deliberative and electoral processes help mitigate conflicts, especially in heterogeneous and conflict-ridden societies.
- Even in a more homogeneous country like China, the absence of open public discourse does the opposite, as evidenced by the State's mishandling of ethnic unrest among Tibetans and Uighurs.
- Respect for Minorities and diversity.
- India's democracy may have been quarrelsome, cumbersome and often dominated by elites, but it has preserved individual liberties, group identities and religious and thought freedoms.

Strong civil society

- Without a strong civil society or an independent judiciary to check government power, Chinese leaders have, on many occasions, made errors in judgment.
 - Judicial decisions overturn Government excesses in democratic countries. China lacks such resilience.
- Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution is an example, which has resulted in the loss of lives.
 - The human cost of Chinese success is enormous and unacceptable.

Transparency

- The absence of political checks and institutional mechanisms for public scrutiny has encouraged abuse of power and high levels of corruption, contributing to high inequality, arbitrary land grabs, unsafe working conditions, food safety scares, and toxic pollution, among other problems.
- As China's economy becomes more complex, the absence of transparent and accountable governance processes, combined with frequent crackdowns on civil society and efforts to enforce conformity and discipline, may stifle entrepreneurship and innovation.

Negotiation

- Democracy may complicate the process leading to needless debates and discussions, but these deliberations allow for forms of negotiation and compromise that can bridge across interests and even balance otherwise conflicting imperatives for growth, justice, sustainability and social inclusion.
- Examples:
 - National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
 - The Right to Information
 - The right to food

Conclusion

- India's pluralistic democracy has increased political awareness and self-assertion, our independent judiciary, Election Commission and regulatory bodies function with a degree of autonomy.
- Therefore, instead of looking up to China, it is time to defend the noise of Indian democracy.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Falling government school enrolment needs to be addressed soon

Context

Proportion of children attending the government schools has been on the decline. This has several implications.

Issues with school education in India

- A quality, free and regular school education represents our most potent infrastructure of opportunity, a fundamental duty of the state.
- Meritocracy represents the idea that people should advance based on their talents and efforts.
- But India's meritocracy is sabotaged by **flailing government schools**.
- The proportion of India's children attending a government school has now **declined to 45 per cent**.
- This number is 85 per cent in America, 90 per cent in England, and 95 per cent in Japan.
- India's **100 per cent plus school enrolment** masks challenges; a **huge dropout ratio and poor learning outcomes**.
- We have **too many schools** and 4 lakh have less than 50 students (70 per cent of schools in Rajasthan, Karnataka, J&K, and Uttarakhand).
- China has similar total student numbers with 30 per cent of our school numbers.

It is not Government Vs. Private schools

- Demand for better government schools is not an argument against private schools.
- Because, without this market response to demand, the post-1947 policy errors in primary education would have been catastrophic for India's human capital.

Way forward

- We need the difficult reforms of governance, performance management, and English instruction.
- **Governance** must shift from control of resources to learning outcomes; learning design, responsiveness, teacher management, community relationships, integrity, fair decision making, and financial sustainability.
- **Performance management**, currently equated with teacher attendance, needs evaluation of scores, skills, competence and classroom management. Scores need continuous assessments or end-of-year exams.
- The new world of work **redefines employability** to include the 3Rs of **reading, writing, and arithmetic** and a fourth R of relationships.
- India's farm to non-farm transition is not happening to factories but to sales and customer services which need 4R competency and **English awareness**.
- English instruction is about bilingualism, higher education pathways, and **employability**.
- Employment outcomes are **50 per cent higher for kids with English familiarity** because of higher geographic mobility, sector mobility, role eligibility, and entrance exam ease.
- India's constitution wrote **Education Policy into Lists I (Centre), II (State), and III (concurrent jurisdiction)**; this fragmentation needs revisiting because it tends to concentrate decisions **that should be made locally** in Delhi or state capitals.

Conclusion

Government needs urgent measure to address the issues which has bearing on its future.

2. Arbitration in India needs urgent attention

Context

Plagued by delays and rising costs, arbitration in India needs urgent attention. The pandemic has only worsened the situation.

Issues with arbitrations process in India

- Arbitrations in India suffers from **rising costs and sluggish proceedings**.
- Arbitration proceedings are often dragged on by lawyers on either side filing misconceived applications at various stages of the proceedings.

- Litigants, too, at times contribute to this delay with their stubbornness in not conceding a loss or defeat.
- The courts have narrowed down the scope of judicial interference under Section 34 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act.
- The very limited recourse for setting aside an arbitral award under the Act invariably means that it will be upheld, even if it appears unfair or illogical.
- The aggrieved party may well be stuck with the award and precluded forever from challenging it.
- Arbitration hearings are **generally held in camera**, and decisions are usually not publicly accessible, giving rise to **doubts about impartiality and fairness**.
- Arbitration proceedings have become more complex with time.
- The Supreme Court, in *Guru Nanak Foundation v. Rattan Singh and Sons*, had expressed disappointment against the **procedural delays and tardiness** in the resolution of disputes through arbitration.
- Even the clauses providing for fees of the arbitrators and fixed timelines for disposal are often disregarded by the players
- The inevitable consequence of these drawbacks is a slow **departure of the biggest litigant, the government**, from the arbitration spectrum.
- A sector that is dominated by approvals, protocols and scrutiny, uncertainty about the budget outlay towards arbitrations and unexpected delays in disposal does not inspire confidence and detracts from the sanctity of the process.

Way forward

- Arbitrators have endeavoured to simplify the proceedings by limiting the pleadings, insisting on written arguments, reducing the number of sittings and laying down a schedule for various milestones.
- **Some restraint is needed from all quarters** to bring its wheels back on the tracks. These are:
 - A small check on the arbitral fees and timelines.
 - **Careful drafting** of arbitration clauses.
 - Stringent **procedural safeguards** to curb delays.
 - Expeditious disposal of the court proceedings and legislative intent towards all of the above.

Conclusion

Arbitration still has the inherent potential and characteristics to outperform other modes of dispute resolution, but for that to happen, some changes are a must.

3. India Industrial Land Bank (IILB)

The GIS Enabled Land Bank is gaining immense popularity.

India Industrial Land Bank (IILB)

- The IILB is a GIS-based portal with all industrial infrastructure-related information such as connectivity, infra, natural resources and terrain, plot-level information on vacant plots, line of activity, and contact details.
- It was launched by the Ministry for Commerce and Industry in 2020.
- Currently, the IILB has approximately 4000 industrial parks mapped across an area of 5.5 lakh hectares of land, serving as a decision support system for investors scouting for land remotely.
- The system has been integrated with industry-based GIS systems of 17 states to have details on the portal updated on a real-time basis and will achieve pan-India integration by December 2021.
- In the previous quarter (Apr - Jun 2021) total users were 13,610 out of which 12,996 were unique users with total page views of approximately 1.3 lakh.

4. dbGENVOC: Database of Genomic Variants of Oral Cancer

Why in News

Recently, the **National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG)**, funded by the **Department of Biotechnology**, has created the world's first database of genomic variations in oral cancer (dbGENVOC).

Key Points

- **About dbGENVOC:**
 - dbGENVOC, a comprehensive, flexible database framework, developed with an aim to **allow potential users to access, query, browse and download** clinically relevant somatic and germline variation data from Indian oral cancer patients.
 - **Somatic or acquired genomic variants** are the most common cause of cancer, occurring from **damage to genes in an individual cell** during a person's life.
 - A germline variant occurs in gametes and is **passed directly from a parent to a child** at the time of conception. Cancers caused by germline **pathogenic** variants are called inherited or hereditary.

- It will be updated annually with variation data from new oral cancer patients from different regions of India and southeast Asia.
- **Cancer Burden in India:**
 - According to the World Cancer Report 2020, India had an **estimated 1.16 million new cancer cases in 2018**.
 - 1 in 10 Indians **will develop** cancer during their lifetime and **1 in 15 will die** of the disease.
 - The **six most common cancer types** in India are breast cancer, oral cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, stomach cancer, and colorectal cancer.
 - **Oral cancer is the most prevalent form of cancer among men in India**, largely fuelled by **tobacco-chewing**.
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
 - **National Cancer Grid (NCG)** is a network of major cancer centers, research institutes, patient groups and charitable institutions across India with the mandate of establishing uniform standards of patient care for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer, providing specialized training and education in oncology (study of cancer) and facilitating collaborative basic, translational and clinical research in cancer. It was formed in August 2012.
 - **National Genomic Grid (NGG):** NGG will collect samples from cancer patients, through a network of pan-India collection centres by bringing all cancer treatment institutions on board.
 - **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS)** is being implemented under **National Health Mission (NHM)** for up-to the district level activities.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Species in news: Avicennia Marina

Scientists at the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) have reported for the first time a reference-grade whole genome sequence of a highly salt-tolerant and salt-secreting true-mangrove species Avicennia Marina.

Avicennia marina

- Avicennia marina is one of the most prominent mangroves species found in all mangrove formations in India.
- It is a salt-secreting and extraordinarily salt-tolerant mangrove species that grows optimally in 75% seawater and tolerates >250% seawater.
- It is among the rare plant species, which can excrete 40% of the salt through the salt glands in the leaves, besides its extraordinary capacity to exclude salt entry to the roots.

Why in news?

- The A. marina genome assembled in this study is nearly complete and can be considered as a reference-grade genome reported so far for any mangrove species globally and the first report from India.
- This study assumes significance as agriculture productivity globally is affected due to abiotic stress factors such as limited water availability and salinization of soil and water.

Its significance

- Availability of water is a significant challenge to crop production in dryland areas, accounting for ~40 per cent of the world's total land area.
- Salinity is prevalent in ~900 million hectares globally (with an estimated 6.73 million ha in India), and it is estimated to cause an annual loss of 27 billion USD.
- The genomic resources generated in the study will pave the way for researchers to study the potential of the identified genes for developing drought and salinity tolerant varieties of important crop species.
- This is particularly important for the coastal region as India has 7,500m of coastline and two major island systems.

6.Kappa Variant: Covid-19

Why in News

Recently, two cases of the **Kappa variant of Covid-19** have been recorded in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- According to the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, Kappa is one of the two Covid-19 variants, the other being **Delta**, first identified in India.
- Earlier a new variant **Lambda** was reported from Peru.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - As India raised **objection over the B.1.617.1 mutant of the novel coronavirus being termed an “Indian Variant”**, the WHO had named this variant **‘Kappa’** and B.1.617.2 ‘Delta’ just as it **named** various variants of the coronavirus using Greek alphabets.
 - The **Delta and Kappa variants are actually siblings, the direct descendants** of a variant that earlier used to be referred to as the **double mutant, or B.1.617.**
 - It is still listed among **‘variants of interest’** and not **‘variants of concern’** by the WHO.
- **Variants of Interest:**
 - They are **SARS-CoV-2 variants with genetic changes** that are predicted or known to **affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, disease severity, immune escape, diagnostic or therapeutic escape.**
 - **Examples:** Lambda, Iota, Eta and Kappa variants.
- **Variant of Concern:**
 - 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.
 - **Examples:** Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants.

7. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

Why in News

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved some modifications in the **Central Sector Scheme** of Financing Facility under **‘Agriculture Infrastructure Fund’**.

Key Points

- **Launch:** It was launched in 2020 as a part of the **Rs. 20 lakh crore stimulus package** announced in response to the **Covid-19 crisis.**
- **Aim:** To provide **medium-long term debt financing facility** for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management Infrastructure and community farming assets.

- The funds will be provided for setting up of cold stores and chains, warehousing, grading and packaging units, e-marketing points linked to e-trading platforms, besides **PPP (Public Private Partnership) projects** for crop aggregation sponsored by central/state/local bodies.
- **Duration:** Extended to 13 years upto 2032-33.
- **Features:**
 - **Eligible Beneficiaries:**
 - They are Farmers, **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**, Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS), Marketing Cooperative Societies, **Self Help Groups (SHGs)**, Joint Liability Groups (JLG), Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, Agri-entrepreneurs, Start-ups, and Central/State agency or Local Body sponsored PPP Projects.
 - Eligibility has been **extended to State agencies and Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs)**, as well as federations of cooperative organisations, FPOs and SHGs.
 - **Financial Support:** Rs. **1 Lakh Crore** will be provided by **banks and financial institutions** as loans to eligible beneficiaries.
 - Moratorium for repayment may vary subject to minimum of 6 months and maximum of 2 years.
 - **Interest Subvention:** Loans will have **interest subvention of 3% per annum** up to a **limit of Rs. 2 crore**. This subvention will be available for a maximum period of seven years.
 - **CGTMSE Scheme:** A credit guarantee coverage will be available for eligible borrowers from this financing facility under **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) scheme** for a loan up to Rs. 2 crore.
- **Management:** The fund will be managed and monitored through an online **Management Information System (MIS)** platform. It will enable all the qualified entities to apply for loans under the Fund.
 - The National, State and District level monitoring committees will be set up to ensure real-time monitoring and effective feed-back.

8. Human-Wildlife Conflict

Why in News

A report 'A Future for All - A Need for Human-Wildlife Coexistence' was recently released by **World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)** and **UNEP**.

- It examined **increasing human-wildlife conflict (HWC)**.
- HWC-related killing affects more than **75% of the world's wild cat species**, as well as many other **terrestrial and marine carnivore species** such as polar bears and Mediterranean monk seals, and **large herbivores** such as elephants.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) refers to struggles that arise when the presence or behaviour of **wildlife poses actual or perceived direct, recurring threats to human interests or needs**, often leading to disagreements between groups of people and negative impacts on people and/or wildlife.
- **Causes of Human-wildlife Conflict:**
 - **Lack of Protected Area:** Marine and terrestrial **protected areas** only cover **9.67% globally**. About 40% of the African lion range and 70% of the African and Asian elephant ranges fall outside protected areas.
 - In India, 35% **tiger** ranges currently lie outside protected areas.
 - **Wildlife-borne Infections: Covid-19 pandemic** – sparked by a zoonotic disease is driven by the close **association of people, their livestock, and wildlife** and by the unregulated consumption of wild animals.
 - With closer and more frequent and diverse contact between animals and people, the probability of animal microbes being transferred to people increases.
 - **Other Reasons:**
 - **Urbanization:** In modern times rapid urbanization and industrialisation have led to the diversion of forest land to non-forest purposes, as a result, the wildlife habitat is shrinking.
 - **Transport Network:** The expansion of road and rail network through forest ranges has resulted in animals getting killed or injured in accidents on roads or railway tracks.
 - **Increasing Human Population:** Many human settlements coming up near the peripheries of protected areas and encroachment in the forest lands by local people for cultivation and collection of food and fodder etc. therefore **increasing pressure on limited natural resources** in the forests.
- **Impacts:**
 - **Impact on Wildlife And Ecosystems:** HWC can have detrimental and permanent impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity. People might kill animals in self-defence, or as pre-emptive or retaliatory killings, which can drive species involved in **conflict to extinction**.

- **Impact on Local Communities:** The most evident and direct negative impacts to people from wildlife are injuries and the loss of lives and of livestock, crops, or other property.
- **Impact on Equity:** The economic and psychological costs of living with wildlife disproportionately **fall to those who live near that wildlife**, while the benefits of a species' survival are distributed to other communities as well.
- **Impact on Social Dynamics:** When a HWC event affects a farmer, that farmer may blame the government for protecting the perpetrator that damages crops, while a conservation practitioner may blame industry and farmers for clearing wild habitats and creating the HWC in the first place.
- **Impact on Sustainable Development:** HWC is the theme in conservation that is strongly linked to the **SDGs** as biodiversity is primary to sustain the developments, even though it is not explicitly mentioned as one.
- **Solution:**
 - **Moving From Conflict To Coexistence:** The goal of HWC management should be to enhance the **safety of people and wildlife** and to create mutual **benefits of coexistence**.
 - **Integrated and Holistic Practices:** Holistic HWC management approaches allow species to survive in areas where they otherwise would have declined or become extinct.
 - All species on our planet also are essential for maintaining ecosystem health and functions.
 - **Participation:** The full participation of local communities can help reduce HWC and lead to coexistence between humans and wildlife.

Indian Scenario

- India faces an increasing challenge of human wildlife conflict, which is driven by **development pressures** and an **increasing population, high demand for land and natural resources**, resulting in loss, fragmentation, and **degradation of wildlife habitats**.
 - These pressures intensify the interactions between people and wildlife because they often share living space without a clear demarcation of boundaries.
- In India, data from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change shows that **over 500 elephants were killed between 2014-15 and 2018-19**, most related to human-elephant conflict.
- During the same period, **2,361 people were killed as a result of conflict** with elephants.
- **Some Initiatives:**

- **Advisory for Management of HWC:** This has been issued by the Standing Committee of **National Board of Wildlife (SC-NBWL)**.
 - **Empower Gram Panchayats:** The advisory envisages empowering gram panchayats in dealing with the problematic wild animals as per the **WildLife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
 - **Provide Insurance:** Utilising add-on coverage under the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna** for crop compensation against crop damage due to HWC.
 - **Augmenting Fodder:** Envisages augmenting fodder and water sources within the forest areas.
 - **Take Proactive Measures:** Prescribes **inter-departmental committees** at local/state level, adoption of **early warning systems, creation of barriers, dedicated circle wise Control Rooms** with toll free hotline numbers, Identification of hotspots etc.
 - **Provide Instant Relief:** Payment of a portion of ex-gratia as interim relief within 24 hours of the incident to the victim/family.
- **State-Specific:**
 - In 2018, the Uttar Pradesh government had given its in-principle approval to bring **man-animal conflict under listed disasters** in the State Disaster Response Fund
 - The Uttarakhand government (2019) carried out **bio-fencing** by growing various species of plants in the areas.
 - The Supreme Court (2020) affirmed the **right of passage of the Elephants** and the closure of resorts in the Nilgiris elephant corridor.
 - Odisha's Athagarh Forest Division has started casting **seed balls (or bombs)** inside different reserve forest areas to enrich food stock for wild elephants to prevent man-elephant conflict.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to Indrajaal Weapon

1. It is a multiple rocket launcher produced in India with a maximum range of 40 km.
2. It is indigenously developed by Grene Robotics, a Hyderabad based company.

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

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

Answer : b

Indrajaal Weapon

- Indrajaal is an autonomous defence weapon system that uses technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, cyber security and robotics to identify and counter threats.
- It is India's first 100 percent indigenous unified, distributed and wide-area Autonomous Drone Defense Dome.

- Each system is capable of protecting a large area of 1000 to 2000 sq. km against threats from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAVs and incoming weapons.
- Indrajaal is a paradigm shift in the drone warfare system including Low Radar cross-section (RCS) threat warfare.

2. With reference to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), consider the following statements:

1. It is the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations (UN)
2. India is not a member but has an observer status in OIC.

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 : A

Explanation

- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the **second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations (UN)** with a membership of 57 states. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.
- India is neither a member nor an observer of the OIC. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

3. Consider the following statements about Planet Saturn:

1. It is the second-largest planet in our solar system.
2. It is the only planet with Rings.
3. Titan is the largest moon of Saturn.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Planet Saturn is the second-largest planet in our solar system.
- Four of the planets in the Solar System have rings. They are the four giant gas planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.
- Titan is the largest moon of Saturn.

4. Consider the following statements:

1. Zika virus is a mosquito-borne flavivirus that was first identified in monkeys.
2. Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause infants to be born with microcephaly.

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

- **Zika virus is a mosquito-borne flavivirus** that was first identified in Uganda in 1947 in monkeys. It was later identified in humans in 1952 in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- **Transmission:**

- ZVD is caused by a virus transmitted primarily by **Aedes mosquitoes (AM)**, mainly *Aedes aegypti*.
- This is the same mosquito that transmits dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever.
- **Zika virus** is also **transmitted from mother to fetus during pregnancy**, through sexual contact, transfusion of blood and blood products, and organ transplantation.
 - Zika virus infection during **pregnancy can cause infants to be born with microcephaly** (smaller than normal head size) and other congenital malformations, known as congenital Zika syndrome. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Symptoms are generally mild and include fever, rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise or headache.
 - Most people with Zika virus infection do not develop symptoms.
- There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika. Instead, the focus is on relieving symptoms and includes rest, rehydration and acetaminophen for fever and pain.

5. Which of the following incidents had occurred when Lord Reading was the Viceroy?

1. Dandi march
2. Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre
3. Establishment of Swaraj party
4. Kakori Train Robbery
5. Malabar rebellion

Options:

- a. 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. 2, 3 and 4 only
- c. 3, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Events that took place when Lord Reading was the Viceroy was the establishment of the Swaraj Party, the Kakori Train Robbery and the Malabar Rebellion.
- Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre took place when Lord Chelmsford was the viceroy.
- Dandi March took place when Lord Irwin was the viceroy.

6. Which Strait separates Malaysia from the Philippines?

- a. Sunda Strait
- b. Balabac Strait
- c. Strait of Malacca
- d. Strait of Makasar

Answer: b

Explanation:

Balabac Strait separates Malaysia from the Philippines.

Mains Practice Questions

1. Contrary to popular perception, India's sex ratio at birth declined even as per capita income increased. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce by explaining the context of the given statement.
- Highlight the issues related to lower sex ratio at birth.
- Discuss the measures needed to improve the lower sex ratio at birth.
- Conclude suitably.

2. Discussing the impacts of Micro Climatic zones shifting in India, suggest measures required to mitigate its impact. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly explain the Micro climatic zones shifting in India.
- Discuss the impact of Micro climatic zones shifting.
- Suggest measures to combat the impacts of Micro climatic zones shifting.
- Write a forward looking conclusion.

