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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Cauvery and the row over Mokedatu project

Context:

- Differences between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the proposed **Mekedatu project**.

Background:

Mekedatu project:

- The Karnataka state government has proposed the Mekedatu dam project in the **Cauvery Basin**.
 - Originally proposed as a **hydropower project**, the revised Mekedatu dam project apart from **catering to the drinking water needs of the Bengaluru Metropolitan City and surrounding areas** will also **help regulate the flow to Tamil Nadu** on a monthly basis, as stipulated by the Tribunal and the Supreme Court.
 - The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, and the subsequent Supreme Court Judgement have made allocations of Cauvery waters to all the riparian States – Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, apart from the Union Territory of Puducherry. It has also stipulated “tentative monthly deliveries during a normal year” to be made available by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.
- Tamil Nadu has challenged this move by Karnataka in the Supreme Court and impressed upon the union government not to grant Centre’s clearance for the project.
 - Tamil Nadu’s argument is that the building of the proposed project as close as 4 kms to the border will **allow the Karnataka state to impound and divert flows from “uncontrolled catchments” to itself** and this it claims goes against the order of the water disputes tribunal verdict which had already considered this component of uncontrolled flows by making allocation of the river waters.

Recommendations:

- The Cauvery river water sharing has become an emotive and political issue over the years and any future interventions must be guided by pragmatism.
 - A possible solution to this new development would be to get **both states to agree to the idea of a joint execution, operation and maintenance of the project** or through a third party's participation.
 - The project if it is agreed to must be implemented after **addressing relevant environmental concerns**.

2. What makes the UAPA so stringent?

Context:

- The death of Father Stan Swamy in judicial custody, has brought into focus **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.

Background:

Origin of the UAPA:

- In the light of the increasing calls for secession in the mid-1960s, **the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, was passed in 1967**.
- It was envisaged as a stringent law to provide for effective prevention of unlawful activities of individuals and associations.
 - The Act provided for declaring an association or a body of individuals "unlawful" if they indulged in any activity that included acts and words, spoken or written, or any sign or representation, that supported any claim to bring about "the cession of a part of the territory of India", or its "secession", or which questions or disclaims the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Amendments over the years:

- Subsequent to the repealing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002, **the UAPA was expanded to include aspects under terrorism through the 2004 amendments**.
- The 2012 amendments sought to bring the UAPA in line with various requirements of the Financial Action Task Force indulged in combating money laundering and terrorism financing.
- The 2013 amendment extended the ban on unlawful organisations to five years from the previous two year period
- In 2019, the Act was amended to empower the government to designate individuals as terrorists.

- Subsequent to the above amendments the **scope of the law has expanded over the years**. It now covers aspects such as punishment for terrorist acts and activities, acts threatening the country's security, including its economic security and provisions to prevent the use of funds for terrorist purposes, including money laundering. It is now the **main Anti terrorism law in India**.

Concerns:

Stringency of the law:

- The stringency of the law has raised **concerns over the right to life and liberty of the accused under the UAPA**.
 - The UAPA provisions differ considerably from the regular criminal laws. The UAPA modifies the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to make it **more stringent**. It provides provisions for longer remand periods as well as judicial custody.
 - The law also makes it more difficult to obtain bail. Under Section 43D(5) of the Act, bail cannot be granted to a suspect if the court is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the charges are prima facie true. This provision is liable for misuse and could **render it almost impossible for anyone to obtain bail until the completion of the trial**.

Against individual rights:

- The provisions of the act give the state authority vague **powers to detain and arrest individuals** who it believes to be indulged in terrorist activities. This gives state more powers vis-a-vis **individual liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution**.

Increase in use:

- There has been a steep **increase in the use of the UAPA law**.
 - According to the data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), there has been over 72% increase in the number of persons arrested under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act) in 2019 compared to the year 2015.

Potential for misuse:

- There has been **very low conviction rate** with respect to cases under UAPA. This is probably indicative of the misuse of the act.

- According to data presented by the Union Home Ministry only 2.2 % of cases registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act between the years 2016 and 2019 ended in convictions by the court.

3. Are COVID-19 curbs telling on immune systems?

Context:

- Amid the gradual easing of lockdowns, some countries are reporting a **higher number of respiratory infections**, including unseasonal diseases such as influenza and the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Immunity debt:

- Experts have attributed this spike in respiratory infections to what is being called the “immunity debt” brought on by **non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)** put in place to reduce the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
 - The NPIs included measures such as social distancing, use of masks, and hand hygiene.
- **The constant exposure to infectious agents boosts the immune response in the human body.** In the absence of this, there is a possibility that there could be **unseasonal outbreaks with greater severity than usual.** This is a major concern for infant population in particular.
- Disruptions to the seasonal transmission patterns of these diseases may have consequences for the timing and severity of future outbreaks.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Services panel charts roadmap to double exports in five years

Context:

- The **Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC)** is preparing a roadmap to **achieve doubling of services exports in the next five years.**

Details:

- The SEPC has urged the government to include incentives for services exports under the upcoming new foreign trade policy.
- The council has tagged areas such as **tourism and hospitality, logistics and medical value travel** as 'champion' sectors meriting additional focus.

Conclusion:

- **Services sector accounts for a vital part of the Indian economy** and with proper support and policies it can play a **significant role in sustainable high economic growth of India.**

5. Govt. infra spending dropped sharply in Q1

Context:

- **Projects Today's survey on project investments in India** for the first quarter of the 2021-22 fiscal.

Details:

- The **second wave of COVID-19 pandemic** has had a devastating impact on the Indian economy. The investments have been hard hit by the pandemic.

Public investment:

- There has been a steep decline in new investment projects from government agencies.
- The public infrastructure investments have almost halved compared with the January-March quarter, with critical sectors like irrigation suffering huge declines of about 96%.
- **Overall new investments from the Union and State governments fell 41.6% as compared to Q4 of 2020-21.**

Private investment:

- Private investments have done relatively better with a **mere 1.7% decline in the Q1 of 2021-22.**
- This could be attributed to the strong performance of the manufacturing sector which posted an impressive 45% increase in investments compared to previous quarter.

Foreign investment:

- Foreign investment projects slipped 95.4% from the previous quarter, with just 17 such projects.

Concerns:

Affect post pandemic economic revival:

- **Overall fresh investments have decreased by 18% in the first quarter of 2021-22**, compared with the previous quarter. This does **not augur well for government's stated push for capital spending to revive the pandemic ravaged economy**.
- The previous quarter had seen both private and public sector investments rebounding strongly for the first time since the pandemic hit India. The new dip in investments does not augur well for economic revival.

Result in infrastructural deficit:

- Public investments in services, including water and sewage projects have fallen significantly. Investments in sectors like electricity, roadways and railways has also been tepid.
- This will **hamper the infrastructural availability in the Indian economy** and it would have an adverse impact in the longer run and also **affect the quality of life for its citizens**.

Skewed pattern:

- Despite a relatively better performance from the private sector in terms of investment, a large chunk of these private investments are related to just four massive projects.
- There has also been marked skewedness in region wise investments with states like Gujarat and Maharashtra bagging a substantial proportion of all new investments. This **does not augur well for balanced regional or sectoral growth**.

Recommendations:

- The government agencies should try and **front load their capital expenditure plans**.
- The government should ensure **timely execution of projects listed in the National Infrastructure Pipeline**.
- These measures will not only revive the economy but also instil confidence in private companies to expedite their own new investment plans.

6. Sikkim blossoms: State home to 27% of India's flowering plants

Context:

- Publication of the **Flora of Sikkim - A Pictorial Guide by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI)**.

Background:

Sikkim's ecology:

- Sikkim is a part of the **Kanchenjunga biosphere landscape**.
- Sikkim is home to **different altitudinal ecosystems**, with the elevation varying from 300 metres to above 8500 metres above mean sea level.

Details:

- The publication lists **532 species of wild orchids (which is more than 40% of all orchid species found in India)**, 36 species of rhododendron and 20 species of oak, and more than 30 species of high-value medicinal plants, among other species.
- Despite being the smallest state in India with less than 1% of India's landmass, **Sikkim is home to 27% of all flowering plants found in India**.
- This presence of a **diverse set of ecosystems varying from the subalpine to the temperate to the tropical** is one of the reasons for high diversity of flora in Sikkim.

Concerns:

- **Developmental activities** such as the widening of roads to Nathu La and the hydel power plants in north Sikkim could have a negative impact on the rich biodiversity of Sikkim.

Additional information:

- The **Sikkim Forest Tree (Amity & Reverence) Rules, 2017** allows any person to associate with trees standing on his or her private land or on any public land by entering into a **Mith/Mit or Mitini relationship**.
- This is an acknowledgement of the unique cultural practice prevalent in Sikkim and is of significance given the global environmental conservational efforts underway.

7. Cuba develops the world's first conjugate vaccine for COVID-19

Context:

- **Cuba's indigenously produced vaccines-** Soberana 2 and Abdala have registered strong efficacy against the SARS-CoV-2.

Details:

- Both Soberana 2 and Abdala are **subunit vaccines**.
 - In Abdala the spike protein of the coronavirus is combined with a chemically manufactured adjuvant, whereas in **Soberana 2, the spike protein is chemically linked to the tetanus toxoid, making it a conjugate vaccine.**

Subunit vaccines

- Rather than injecting a whole pathogen to trigger an immune response, subunit vaccines (sometimes called acellular vaccines) contain purified pieces of it, which have been specially selected for their ability to stimulate immune cells.
- In the case of these subunit vaccines, a part of the virus forms the antigen and is hitched on to another construct.

Advantages:

- Well established technology
- Relatively stable
- Suitable for people with compromised immune systems
- Because of the absence of live components, there is no risk of the vaccine triggering diseases and hence the subunit vaccines are considered very safe.

Disadvantages:

- Adjuvants and booster shots may be required.
- Determining the best antigen combination takes time
- Relatively complex to manufacture

Conjugate vaccines

- A conjugate vaccine is a type of vaccine which combines a weak antigen with a strong antigen as a carrier so that the immune system has a stronger immunological response to the weak antigen.

- The most common conjugate vaccines are those used for Haemophilus influenza type b and the pneumococcal bacteria.

Advantages:

- Major advantages of the conjugate vaccines are their ability to elicit immunological memory and to reduce asymptomatic carriage of the bacteria, resulting in marked herd immunity.
- Also conjugate vaccines have a very good safety record and have been associated with very few, serious adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) after more than 20 years of use.
- They give rise to improved immune memory and thus offer longer lasting protection.
- They help offer protection to infants and toddlers,

Significance of the Cuban vaccines:

- The design and manufacturing of the conjugate vaccines allows them to be **stored in regular refrigeration settings of 2-8 degree Celsius**
- The methodology involved is also one of the **most economical approaches to vaccine production.**

Challenges:

- Soberana and Abdala being **three-shot vaccines**, there could be “logistic” concerns with the vaccine administration.
- The subunit vaccines have been **generally used against bacteria and not viruses.**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India and Nepal

In news Rail Transportation between India & Nepal got a major boost recently.

- Both countries gave authorization to all cargo train operators to utilize the Indian railway network to carry all containers bound for Nepal.
- Letter of Exchange (LoE) between officials of India & Nepal was also signed.

- After this LoE, all kinds of cargoes in all categories of wagons that can carry freight on Indian Railways network within India can also carry freight to and from Nepal

Benefits of the LoE

- This liberalization will allow market forces to come up in the rail freight segment in Nepal.
- Likely to increase efficiency and cost- competitiveness, eventually benefiting the Nepalese consumers.
- Move will reduce transportation costs for automobiles and certain other products whose carriage takes place in special wagons.
- Another milestone in India's efforts to enhance regional connectivity under the "Neighbourhood First" policy.

Do you know?

- The Central government on 21 September 2016 approved merger of the Rail and General budgets from 2017, ending a 92-year-old practice of a separate budget for the Railways.
- The decision to merge both the budgets was based on the recommendations of the committee chaired by Member of NITI Aayog, Bibek Debroy.

GIS Enabled Land Bank

In news GIS Enabled Land Bank has been gaining popularity. The website has seen a 30% increase in page views each month since April 2021

What is the Land Bank System?

- The Land Bank system has been developed by the Integration of Industrial Information System (IIS) with state GIS (Geographic Information System).
- IIS portal is a GIS-enabled database of industrial clusters/areas across the states.
- It is a one-stop repository of all industrial infrastructure-related information – connectivity, infra, natural resources & terrain, plot-level information on vacant plots, line of activity, and contact details.
- Currently, the IILB has approximately 4000 industrial parks mapped
- On the system, more than 3,300 industrial parks across 31 states/UTs covering about 4,75,000 hectares of land have also been mapped out.

- The information available on the system will include drainage, forest; raw material heat maps (horticulture, agricultural, mineral layers); multilayer of connectivity.
- IIS has adopted a committed approach towards industrial upgrading, resource optimization, and sustainability.

Who are the Various stakeholders?

- The initiative has been supported by the National e-Governance Division (NeGD), National Centre of Geo-Informatics (NCoG), Invest India, Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-Informatics (BISAG), and Ministry of Electronics and Informational Technology.

2. BRICS

In news All BRICS countries have agreed to the STI-led BRICS Innovation Cooperation Action Plan (2021-24) proposed by India during the 12th Meeting of BRICS S&T Steering Committee.

- Indian had proposed the plan to facilitate sharing of experiences of each other's innovation ecosystem and networking of innovators and entrepreneurs.

About BRICS

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually.
- BRICS does not exist in the form of organization, but it is an annual summit.
- The Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
 - - Together, BRICS accounts for about 40% of the world's population and about 30% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), making it a critical economic engine.
 - It's an emerging investment market and global power bloc
- **Objectives:**
 -

- The BRICS seeks to deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.
- BRICS takes into consideration each member's growth, development and poverty objectives to ensure relations are built on the respective country's economic strengths and to avoid competition where possible.
- BRICS is emerging as a new and promising political-diplomatic entity with diverse objectives, far beyond the original objective of reforming global financial institutions.

What are the components of financial architecture of the BRICS?

- **New Development Bank**

- - NDB is headquartered in Shanghai.
 - During the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (2014) the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the New Development Bank (NDB).
 - NDB's key areas of operation are clean energy, transport infrastructure, irrigation, sustainable urban development and economic cooperation among the member countries.

- **Contingent Reserve Arrangement**

- - Considering the increasing instances of global financial crisis, BRICS nations signed BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) in 2014 as part of Fortaleza Declaration at Sixth BRICS summit.
 - The BRICS CRA aims to provide short-term liquidity support to the members through currency swaps to help mitigating BOP crisis situation and further strengthen financial stability.
 - The initial total committed resources of the CRA shall be one hundred billion dollars

3. Zika Virus Disease

In news Recently, Zika Virus Disease (ZVD) was reported for the first time in Kerala.

What is a Zika Virus?

- 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.
- 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.
- **Transmission:** From mother to fetus during pregnancy, through sexual contact, transfusion of blood and blood products, and organ transplantation.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Fever, rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise or headache.
 - Most people with Zika virus infection do not develop symptoms.
 - 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.
- **Treatment:**
 - There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika.
 - The focus is on relieving symptoms and includes rest, rehydration and acetaminophen for fever and pain.

Related Indian Government Programme/Initiatives

- **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme:** To strengthen/maintain decentralized laboratory based and IT enabled disease surveillance systems for epidemic prone diseases to monitor disease trends.
- **National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme:** The central nodal agency for prevention and control of six vector borne diseases i.e. Malaria, Dengue, Lymphatic Filariasis, Kala-azar, Japanese Encephalitis and Chikungunya in India.
- **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK):** An initiative under the National Health Mission, has a surveillance for Microcephaly (system for monitoring birth defects).

4. Judicial Appointment System

Collegium System

- In Second Judges case, 1992, SC held that the **Collegium's (CJI and the four senior-most judges of the SC)** recommendations to President for appointment of Judges to HC & SC are **binding in nature**.

- Supreme Court has **re-interpreted Article 124 and 214** of the Constitution & upheld Collegium system so as to secure Independence of Judiciary & the rule of law.
- **SC even struck down National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)** as it strongly disapproved of any role for the political executive in the appointment of judges, saying, “reciprocity and feelings of payback to the political executive” would be disastrous to the independence of the judiciary.

Procedure for Various Judicial Appointments:

For CJI:

- In practice, it has been strictly by seniority ever since the supersession controversy of the 1970s.
- President appoints CJI.

For SC Judges:

- The proposal is initiated by the CJI.
- The **CJI consults the rest of the Collegium members**, as well as the senior-most judge of the court hailing from the High Court to which the recommended person belongs.
- The consultees must record their opinions in writing and it should form part of the file.
- The Collegium sends the recommendation to the Law Minister, who forwards it to the Prime Minister to advise the President (recommendations of Collegium is binding)

Criticism of Collegium System

- Opaqueness and a lack of transparency.
- Scope for nepotism.
- There are allegations that candidates lacking in essential attributes have been appointed routinely.
- It is dilution of doctrine of checks & balances (for ex: In USA, President appoints Judges of Supreme Court)

Conclusion

There is a heavy burden on shoulders of Judges of Collegium. One can only hope and pray that they will discharge it in consonance with constitutional oath & dispel any criticism against it.

About National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)

- NJAC was envisaged as body to replace Collegium system to make appointments to higher Judiciary
- It was established by 99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2014 but was struck down by SC as unconstitutional
- NJAC was to consist of the following members:
 - Chief Justice of India (Chairperson, ex officio)
 - Two other senior judges of the Supreme Court next to the Chief Justice of India – ex officio
 - Union Minister of Law – ex-officio
 - Two eminent persons (to be nominated by a committee consisting of **CJI, PM and the Leader of Opposition** or leader of single largest opposition party in the **Lok Sabha**)

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Salt-secreting Mangrove Species

In news For the first time a reference-grade whole genome sequence of a highly salt-tolerant and salt-secreting true-mangrove species, *Avicennia marina*, was reported in India recently.

About *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.

What is the significance of the study?

- 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.
- Availability of water is a significant challenge to crop production in dryland areas.
- Salinity is prevalent in ~900 million hectares globally 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 of the coastal region that is significant for India.

What are the mangroves?

- Mangroves are a unique group of species found in marshy intertidal estuarine regions and survive a high degree of salinity through several adaptive mechanisms.
- Mangroves are important resources for the coastal region and are of great ecological and economic value such as:
 - production of woody trees
 - provision of habitat, food, and spawning grounds for fin-fish and shellfish
 - provision of habitat for birds and other valuable fauna
 - protection of coastlines and accretion of sediment to form new land.
- They form a link between marine and terrestrial ecosystems, protect shorelines, and provide habitat for a diverse array of terrestrial organisms.
- According to the India State of Forest Report, 2017, India has nearly 3.3% of the world's mangrove vegetation.

6. Methane in the Moons of Saturn

In news NASA's Cassini spacecraft had detected an unusually high concentration of methane, along with carbon dioxide and dihydrogen, in the moons (**Titan and Enceladus**) of Saturn by flying through their plumes (in 2017).

- It found that Titan has methane in its atmosphere and Enceladus has a liquid ocean with erupting plumes of gas and water.
- An international research team has used new statistical methods to understand if methanogenesis or methane production by microbes could explain the molecular hydrogen and methane.

What are the Findings of Cassini?

- Cassini found **ice particles, salts, hydrogen and organic molecules in the plumes**, tentative hints of an ocean that is similar to Earth's oceans in composition.

- There is also **evidence for alkaline hydrothermal vents on Enceladus' seafloor**, similar to those that support methanogens in Earth's oceans.

What are Methanogens?

- Most of the methane on Earth has a biological origin.
- Microorganisms called methanogens are capable of generating methane as a metabolic byproduct.
- They do not require oxygen to live and are widely distributed in nature.
- They are found in swamps, dead organic matter, and even in the human gut.
- They are known to survive in high temperatures and simulation studies have shown that they can live in Martian conditions.
- Methanogens have been widely studied to understand if they can be a contributor to global warming.
- Possibility of Methanogens on Enceladus:
 - Methane could be formed by the chemical breakdown of organic matter present in Enceladus' core.
 - Hydrothermal processes could help the formation of carbon dioxide and methane.
 - Enceladus' hydrothermal vents could be habitable to Earth-like microorganisms (Methanogens).
- **Few missions have visited Saturn:** Pioneer 11 and Voyagers 1 and 2 flew by; But Cassini orbited Saturn 294 times from 2004 to 2017.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to Lymphatic filariasis, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a neglected tropical disease.
2. It is spread from person to person by mosquitoes.
3. Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis was established by the WHO.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Lymphatic filariasis is a Neglected Tropical Disease.
- The causative organism for Filariasis is a roundworm of the *Filarioidea* type.
- 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.
- Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis was established by the World Health Organisation.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Oral cancer is the most prevalent form of cancer among men in India.
2. The dbGENVOC is the world's first database for genomic variations in oral cancer created by India.

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

- 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. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
 - According to the World Cancer Report 2020, India had an estimated 1.16 million new cancer cases in 2018.
- 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)**. Hence, statement 2 is correct.
 - 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.
 - It will be updated annually with variation data from new oral cancer patients from different regions of India and southeast Asia.

3. Consider the following statements with respect to National Green Tribunal:

1. It has its presence in four zones only.
2. The Principal Bench is situated in the North Zone, headquartered in Delhi.
3. Engaging an advocate is compulsory to approach the Tribunal.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- National Green Tribunal has five zones – North, south, east, west and central zones.
- The Principal Bench is situated in the North Zone and is headquartered in Delhi.
- Engaging an advocate is not compulsory to approach the Tribunal. A party can fight his/her own case without an advocate, in the NGT.

4. With reference to Forest Rights Act, 2006, consider the following statements:

1. Forest rights can be claimed by members who have been living for at least two generations prior to the cut off date.
2. The Gram Sabha is the authority to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of forest rights.

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

- **Forest Rights Act, 2006 recognizes the forest rights in Forest land** for Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD) who have been residing in such forests for generations.
- Forest rights can also be **claimed by any member or community who has for at least three generations (75 years) prior to the 13th day of December, 2005 (cut off date)** primarily resided in forest land for bona fide livelihood needs. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The **Gram Sabha** is the authority to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) or Community Forest Rights (CFR) or both that may be given to FDST and OTFD. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

5. In the context of global oil prices, 'Brent crude oil' is frequently referred to in the news. What does this term imply?

1. It is a major classification of crude oil.
2. It is sourced from the North Sea.
3. It does not contain sulphur.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Brent crude oil is a major classification of crude oil. It is sourced from the North Sea. The Brent crude oil also contains sulphur.

6. India and Nepal share which of the following multilateral forums?

1. BBIN
2. BIMSTEC
3. SAARC
4. BRI

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A 1 and 2 only
B 2 only
C 1, 2 and 3
D 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer : C

Explanation

- Nepal is an important neighbour of India and occupies special significance in its foreign policy because of the geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries.
 - The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
- **India and Nepal** share multiple multilateral forums such as **BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal)**, **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal**

Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), Non Aligned Movement (NAM), and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) etc.

- In 2017, Nepal signed up to China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, which sought to create highways, airports and other infrastructure in the country.
 - BRI was **rejected by India** and this move of Nepal was seen as an inclination towards China. **Hence, option C is correct.**

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Do you agree that the Right to Information Act, 2005 is a master key to good governance? Justify. (150 words)

Approach

- Briefly explain the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005 establishing its relationship with good governance.
- Discuss the role of RTI in attaining the elements of good governance like accountability, transparency etc. and give some examples.
- Discuss the limitations of RTI how it sometimes impedes good governance.
- Write a conclusion assessing the arguments given in your answer.

2Q. In the wake of the slowdown in economic activities due to the lockdown, the rise in Non-performing assets (NPAs) is inevitable. In this context, critically analyse the need for the bad bank. (250 words)

Approach

- Start your answer by explaining the challenge of rising Non-performing assets (NPAs) in the wake of an economic slowdown in lockdown. Along with that, you should briefly define Bad bank and how it can help in resolution of NPAs.
- As the question demands you to critically analyse the bad bank, first state the benefits of Bank bank and then challenges associated with it.
- Summarise your answer and conclude by suggesting some measures in terms of implementation.

