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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India, Russia to hold 2+2 Ministerial meet

Context:

- Russian envoy's statement on the **India-Russia bilateral relationship**.

Background:

- Despite India's increasing strategic alignment, India's bilateral relation with Russia remains high on India's agenda as is evident from **the recent visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister to Moscow**.
- India and Russia enjoy a **special and privileged strategic partnership**.

Details:

- India and Russia intend to hold the first **2+2 Ministerial meeting** before the planned **leader's summit** between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- There are also plans for both **trade and economic as well defence intergovernmental commissions** between the two nations.
- Apart from the bilateral engagements, India and Russia would also engage in **multilateral forums like BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the G20**.

2. SC to examine plea challenging sedition

Context:

- A Supreme Court bench led by CJI N.V. Ramana has agreed to examine a **petition challenging the validity of section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code**.

Background:

- The Supreme Court in its **1962 judgment in the Kedar Nath case had upheld the constitutional validity of Section 124A**.

- The court had reasoned that without Section 124A, the state would be in jeopardy if the government was subverted. It also placed certain restrictions on its usage by emphasizing that Section 124A would apply only to expressions that either intended to or had the tendency to cause violence.

Details:

Petitioner's claims:

- The major argument of the petitioner for a relook of Section 124A is the fact that the Kedar Nath Singh judgement being almost 60 years old fails to accommodate more recent doctrines such as '**chilling effect**' on free speech in its analysis on the impact of sedition provisions.
 - The doctrine of 'chilling effect' on speech considers the probability of a legal provision causing psychological barriers in the free exercise of the right to speech and expression.
- The petitioner also claims that Section 124A criminalized expressions based on **vague terms such as 'disaffection towards government' and 'contempt towards government'**. The lack of a clear definition makes it **liable for misuse by the administration**.

3. 'LAC impasse is affecting bilateral ties'

Context:

- Meeting between India's External Affairs Minister and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the **meeting of the council of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Dushanbe, Tajikistan**.

Background:

- Previously, India and China had agreed on a **five-point agreement for resolving the issues at the LAC**, when the two foreign ministers last met in Moscow in September 2020.

Details:

- India has expressed its displeasure over the **lack of progress in the disengagement process** apart from the initial withdrawal of troops around the Pangong lake area in February 2021.

- China continues to maintain a large troop presence in other **contested areas like Depsang, Gogra and Hotsprings areas in Ladakh.**
- India has also pointed out the impasse between Indian and Chinese troops at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) **impacting the bilateral ties negatively** and has made it clear that bilateral relations on other issues with China could not proceed successfully unless the present LAC situation is resolved.

4. Five years later, Brexit continues to divide

Brexit:

BREXIT - An Overview

Good Friday Agreement

- It is also known as the Belfast Agreement and was signed on Good Friday, 10th April 1998.
- It provided a framework for political settlement in Northern Ireland
 - It was an agreement between the British and Irish governments, and most of the political parties in Northern Ireland, on how Northern Ireland should be governed.
- The aim was to establish a new, devolved government for Northern Ireland in which unionists and nationalists would share power.

Concerns

- Brexit threatens the fragile peace imposed by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which formally ended the Troubles, or decades of bitter sectarian violence.

Scottish nationalism

- **Brexit has reinvigorated Scottish nationalism.**
- **In the 2016 Brexit referendum, Scotland voted 62-38 to stay in the European Union. Scottish demands for independence may resurface.**

5. Drop cases filed under Section 66A: Centre

Context:

- The Union Home Ministry advisory to States and Union Territories on **Section 66A of the Information Technology Act.**

Background:

- The Supreme Court had recently expressed **concerns over the continued usage of Section 66A** despite it having been struck down 6 years ago by the Supreme Court in the Shreya Singhal case.

Details:

- The Union Home Ministry has issued an advisory asking the authorities in the States and the Union Territories to direct all police stations **not to register cases under the repealed provision of Section 66A of the IT act.**
- It has also asked the States and the Union Territories to immediately **withdraw the cases** registered under the repealed Section.

6. Making welfare conditional is a stamp of coercion

Context

- On World Population Day, Uttar Pradesh chief minister unveiled the new population policy for 2021-2030
 - It is an annual event, observed on July 11 every year
 - The day is dedicated to focusing on the importance of population issues.

Details

- In the new population policy, a target has been set to bring the birth rate to 2.1 per thousand population by 2026 and to 1.9 by 2030.
- It promotes a two-child policy, violation of which would mean people will be debarred from contesting local body elections, applying for government jobs or receiving any government subsidy.
 - The Uttar Pradesh government will give promotions, increments, concessions in housing schemes and others perks to employees who adhere to population control norms, and have two or less children.
 - For those who are not government employees and still contribute towards keeping the population in check, will get benefits in like rebates in taxes on water, housing, home loans etc.

- As per the policy, efforts will be made to increase accessibility of contraceptive measures under the family planning programme and provide a proper system for safe abortions.
- Care of the elderly, and better management of education, health, and nutrition of adolescents between 11 to 19 years has also been ensured in the policy

Implementation

- The Uttar Pradesh government plans to set up a state population fund to implement the measures.
- The provision of this legislation shall apply to a married couple where the boy is not less than 21 years of age and the girl is not less than 18.

Concerns

- The policy is in conflict with the central Government submission in the Supreme Court where it said “international experience shows that any coercion to have a certain number of children is counter-productive and leads to demographic distortions”.
 - The Government further confirmed that India was committed to its obligations under international law, including the principles contained in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, 1994.

Supreme Court's view

- In *Suchita Srivastava & Anr vs Chandigarh Administration* (2009), the Court found that a woman's freedom to make reproductive decisions is an integral facet of the right to personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21.
 - “It is important, to recognise that reproductive choices can be exercised to procreate as well as to abstain from procreating”.
- Multiple judgments have also pointed that a person's autonomy over their body as an extension of the right to privacy

Aborting the girl child

- In a hope to have a male child, families may abort the daughters to comply by the two child policy.
- It may lead to a proliferation in sterilisation camps, illegal abortion clinics, which may further harm the mothers.

Alternative Strategies

- The success of southern states in containing population growth indicates that economic growth as well as attention to education, health and empowerment of women work far better to Disincentivize larger families than punitive measures.
 - In areas with high poverty, low economic growth and fewer educated women, fertility levels tend to be higher.

Conclusion

- Any government interested in supporting fertility decline, thus, must work on the education and empowerment of women

7. Cabinet nod to continue Ayush Mission

National Ayush Mission:

- The **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** of National AYUSH Mission (NAM) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of AYUSH.
- The basic objective of NAM is to **promote AYUSH medical systems** through cost-effective AYUSH services, strengthening of educational systems, facilitate the enforcement of quality control of **Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani & Homoeopathy** (ASU &H) drugs and sustainable availability of ASU & H raw materials.
- The National AYUSH Mission (NAM) envisages better access to AYUSH services through an increase in the number of AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries, and ensuring the availability of AYUSH drugs and trained manpower.

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **continuation of the National Ayush Mission for another five years till 2026.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

8. Rs. 9,800 crore support for livestock development

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved to spend ₹9,800 crore on livestock development over the next five years.

Details:

- All schemes of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying will be merged into three broad categories – **Indigenous cows and dairy development, Livestock health and Infrastructure development.**

Significance:

- This move by the central government will help attract almost ₹55,000 crore of outside investment into the animal husbandry sector.
- This would involve spending by State governments and cooperatives, financial institutions and external funding agencies.
- The planned expenditure will help **boost growth in the animal husbandry sector which engages around 10 crore farmers.**

9. WPI inflation remains 'high'

Context:

- **Wholesale price inflation has been recorded at 12.07% for June 2021.**
 - This follows another month of high wholesale price inflation of 12.94% in May 2021.

Responsible factors:

- The wholesale price inflation is being attributed to a low base effect along with the **rise in prices of petrol, diesel, naphtha and ATF**, as well as those of **basic metals and food products.**

Concerns:

- The high wholesale prices could **push up the production costs and render Indian products uncompetitive in the global markets.**
- The increase in raw material and fuel and power prices would result in a **squeeze on the working capital of the already struggling small businesses.**
- The wholesale price inflation will invariably have a **spillover effect on retail inflation** and this could **cramp any monetary policy intervention** to revive the economy in the post-pandemic scenario.

- The high inflation rates could **hamper the demand in the economy** which in turn will affect the economic revival in the predominantly domestic consumption-based Indian economy.

Recommendations:

- The government could consider **bringing petroleum products into the ambit of GST to rationalise prices.**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary

Why in News

The Union Government has approved continuation of the **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for Development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary** for further five years **to 2026** at a total cost of Rs. 9000 crore.

- Rs.50 crore will be allocated for **Gram Nyayalayas Scheme** through **National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms.**

National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms

- **Launch:** It was approved by the Union Government in June 2011.
- **Objective:** To increase access to justice by reducing delays and arrears in the system and enhance accountability through structural changes and by

Key Points

- **About:**
 - CSS for Development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary has been in operation **since 1993-94.**
 - This proposal for continuation of the CSS will help in construction of 3800 court halls and 4000 residential units (both new and ongoing projects) for judicial officers of District and Subordinate Courts, 1450 lawyer halls, 1450 toilets complexes and 3800 digital computer rooms.

- This will help in improving the functioning and performance of the Judiciary in the country and will be a new step towards building better courts for a new India.
- The upgraded “Nyaya Vikas-2.0” **web portal** and mobile application is used for monitoring physical and financial progress of CSS judicial infrastructure projects by geo-tagging completed and ongoing projects.
- **Gram Nyayalayas:**
 - Gram Nyayalayas or village courts are established under the **Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008** for speedy and easy access to the justice system in the rural areas of India.
 - The Act came into force from 2nd October 2009.
 - **Jurisdiction:**
 - A Gram Nyayalaya has jurisdiction **over an area specified by a notification by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.**
 - The Court **can function as a mobile court** at any place within the jurisdiction of such Gram Nyayalaya, after giving wide publicity to that regard.
 - They have **both civil and criminal jurisdiction over the offences.**
 - **Monitoring:**
 - The **Gram Nyayalaya Portal** helps online monitoring of working of the Gram Nyayalayas by the implementing states.
- **Issues related to Judiciary in India:**
 - The **judge-population ratio in the country** is not very appreciable.
 - While for the other countries, the ratio is about 50-70 judges per million people, in India it is 20 judges per million heads.
 - It is only since the pandemic that the **court proceedings** have started to **take place virtually** too, earlier the role of technology in the judiciary was not much larger.
 - The posts in the judiciary are not filled up as expeditiously as required.
 - The process of judicial appointment is delayed due to delay in recommendations by the **collegium** for the higher judiciary.
 - Delay in recruitment made by the state commission/high courts for lower judiciary is also a cause of the poor judicial system.
 - Frequent **adjournments are granted by the courts** to the advocates which leads to **unnecessary delays** in justice.

Way Forward

- The CSS Scheme will increase the availability of well-equipped Court Halls and Residential Accommodations for Judges/Judicial Officers of District and Subordinate Courts all over the country.

- Setting up of digital computer rooms will also improve digital capabilities and give impetus to the digitization initiation being pursued as a part of India's Digital India vision.
- This will help in improving the overall functioning and performance of the Judiciary. Continued assistance to the Gram Nyayalayas will also give impetus to providing speedy, substantial and affordable justice to the common man at his doorstep.

2. Need for Changes in Anti-Defection Law

Why in News

The **Leader of Opposition** in the Goa Legislative Assembly is **set to move a private member's resolution** to recommend to the Central government to address the various issues associated with the **anti-defection law**.

Key Points

- **About Anti-Defection Act:**
 - The **Tenth Schedule** – popularly known as the **Anti-Defection Act** – was included in the Constitution via the **52nd Amendment Act, 1985** and sets the provisions for **disqualification of elected members on the grounds** of defection to another political party.
 - The **grounds for disqualification** under the Anti-Defection Law are as follows:
 - If an elected member **voluntarily gives up his membership** of a political party.
 - If he **votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party** or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
 - As a pre-condition for his disqualification, his abstention from voting should not be condoned by his party or the authorised person within 15 days of such incident.
 - If **any independently elected member joins any political party.**
 - If **any nominated member joins any political party after the expiry of six months.**
 - As per the 1985 Act, a 'defection' by **one-third of the elected members** of a political party was considered a '**merger**'.
 - But the **91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003**, changed this and now at **least two-thirds of the members** of a party have to be in favour of a "merger" for it to have validity in the eyes of the law.

- The members so disqualified can stand for elections from any political party for a seat in the same House.
- The decision on questions as to disqualification on ground of defection are referred to the **Chairman or the Speaker of such House, which is subject to 'Judicial review'**.
- **Issues Related to Anti-Defection Law:**
 - **Undermining Representative Democracy:** After enactment of the Anti-defection law, the MP or MLA has to follow the party's direction blindly.
 - This leaves them with **no freedom to vote** their judgment on any issue and undermines representative democracy.
 - **Undermining Legislatures:** The core role of an elected MLA or MP is to examine and decide on a policy, bills, and budgets.
 - Instead, the MP becomes just another number to be tallied by the party on any vote that it supports or opposes.
 - **Undermining Parliamentary Democracy:** In the parliamentary form, the government is accountable daily through questions and motions and can be removed any time it loses the support of the majority of members of the Lok Sabha.
 - Due to Anti-Defection law, this **chain of accountability has been broken** by making legislators accountable primarily to the political party.
 - Thus, anti-defection law is acting against the concept of parliamentary democracy.
 - **Controversial Role of Speaker:** In many instances, the Speaker (usually from the ruling party) has delayed deciding on the disqualification.
 - The Supreme Court has tried to plug this by ruling that the Speaker has to decide the case in three months, but it is not clear what would happen if a Speaker does not do so.
 - **No Recognition of Split:** Due to the **91st constitutional amendment 2004**, the anti-defection law created an exception for anti-defection ruling.
 - According to this, if two-thirds of the strength of a party should agree for a 'merger' then it will not be counted as a defection.
 - However, the amendment does not recognise a 'split' in a legislature party and instead recognises a 'merger'.
- **Proposed Changes:**
 - One option is that **such matters be referred directly to the high court or the Supreme Court for an express judgment -- should be given within a period of 60 days.**

- The second option is that if **somebody has any difference of opinion with respect to the party** or the party leadership, he **has the option to resign** and seek the fresh mandate of the people.
- These changes **envisage the need for an elected representative to be accountable and responsible** towards the people.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Intra-Party Democracy:** If government stability is an issue due to people defecting from their parties, the answer is for parties to strengthen their internal part of democracy.
- **Regulating Political Parties:** There is an ardent need for legislation that governs political parties in India. Such a law should bring political parties under RTI, strengthen intra-party democracy, etc.
- **Relieving Chairman/Speaker From Adjudicating Powers:** Chairman/Speaker of the house, being the final authority in terms of defection, affects the doctrine of separation of powers.
 - In this context, transferring this power to higher judiciary or to Election Commission (recommended by 2nd ARC report) may curb the menace of defection.
- **Restricting the Scope of Anti-defection Law:** In order to shield the detrimental effect of the anti-defection law on representative democracy, the scope of the law can be restricted to only those laws, where the defeat of government can lead to loss of confidence.

3. New Solar Projects: NTPC

Why in News

Recently, **National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) Renewable Energy Ltd (REL)** signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the **Union Territory of Ladakh** to set up the country's first **Green Hydrogen Mobility project**.

- NTPC REL will also set up a **solar park at Rann of Kutch in Gujarat** from where it will also generate **green hydrogen** on a commercial scale under the **Ultra-Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPP) scheme**.
 - **Hydrogen produced from renewable sources is called green hydrogen.**

Ultra-Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPP) scheme

- It is a scheme to develop **Ultra Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPPs)** under the existing **Solar Park Scheme**.
 - The scheme was rolled out by the **Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) in 2014**.
 - **Solar Park Scheme** is also a scheme of MNRE to set up a number of solar parks across various states in the country. It proposes to provide financial support by the Government of India to establish solar parks.
- The objective of the UMREPP is **to provide land upfront to the project developer and facilitate transmission infrastructure for developing Renewable Energy (RE) based Power Parks** with solar/wind/hybrid and also with storage systems.

Key Points

- **Green Hydrogen Mobility Project:**
 - NTPC REL has planned to **ply 5 hydrogen buses**, to start with, in the region and the company will be **setting up a solar plant and a green hydrogen generation unit** in Leh towards this end.
 - This will put **Leh as the first city in the country** to implement a green hydrogen based mobility project. This would be **zero emission mobility in true sense**.
 - This is also **in line with the Prime Minister's vision of a 'carbon neutral' Ladakh**.
 - It will **help Ladakh develop a carbon free economy** based on renewable sources and green hydrogen.
- **India's Largest Solar Park:**
 - NTPC REL will set up a **4.75 gigawatt (GW) renewable energy park at Rann of Kutch** in Khavada, Gujarat. This will be **India's largest solar park** to be built by the largest power producer of the country.
 - Kutch region in Gujarat, the **largest salt desert in the country** and host to two of India's largest coal-fired power plants, will now add another feather to its cap.
- **Other Major Projects of NTPC:**
 - Recently, NTPC has also commissioned **India's largest Floating Solar of 10 MW (ac)** on the reservoir of Simhadri Thermal Power Plant, Andhra Pradesh. An additional **15 MW (ac) would be commissioned by August 2021**.
 - Further, a **100 MW Floating Solar Project on the reservoir of Ramagundam Thermal Power Plant, Telangana** is in the advanced stage of implementation.
- **Other Solar Energy Initiatives:**

- **National Solar Mission** : Solar energy has taken a central place in India's **National Action Plan on Climate Change** with the National Solar Mission as one of the key Missions.
- **INDC's target**: It targets installing 100 GW grid-connected solar power plants by the year 2022.
 - This is in line with **India's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)** target to achieve about 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources and to reduce the emission intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35% from 2005 level by 2030.
- **Launch of ISA**: The launch of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** was announced by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France in 2015, at the **21st session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-21) in Paris, France**.
- **Government Schemes**: Such as Solar Park Scheme, Canal bank & Canal top Scheme, Bundling Scheme, **Grid Connected Solar Rooftop Scheme** etc.
- **One Sun One World One Grid**: India has an ambitious cross-border power grid plan '**One Sun One World One Grid**' that seeks to transfer solar power generated in one region to feed the electricity demands of others.

National Thermal Power Corporation Limited

- NTPC Ltd. is a central **Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Power**.
 - **NTPC REL is a 100% subsidiary of NTPC**.
- It is **India's largest energy conglomerate** with roots planted way back in 1975 to accelerate power development in India.
- It aims to **provide reliable power and related solutions in an economical, efficient and environment-friendly manner**, driven by innovation and agility.
 - NTPC has also been **promoting usage of green hydrogen based solutions** in sectors like mobility, energy, chemical, fertilizer, steel etc.
- It became a **Maharatna company** in May 2010.
- It is located in New Delhi.

4. Scheme for Development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for the Development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary. It also approved the decision to support the Gram Nyayalayas by providing recurring and non-recurring grants for a period of 5 years with a total outlay of Rs 50 crores.

About the Scheme

- A Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for Development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary has been in operation since 1993-94.
- Adequacy of judicial infrastructure is critical for the reduction of pendency and backlog of cases in Courts.
- The primary responsibility of infrastructure development for the subordinate judiciary rests with the State Governments.
- The present proposal provides for additional activities like the construction of lawyer halls, toilets complexes and digital computer rooms.
- This will add to the convenience of lawyers and litigants besides reducing the digital divide.

Why such a move?

- Adequacy of judicial infrastructure is critical for the reduction of pendency and backlog of cases in Courts.
- Several courts are still functioning in rented premises with insufficient space and some in dilapidated conditions without basic amenities.
- Well-equipped judicial infrastructure facilitates the administration of justice in a manner that allows easy access and timely delivery of justice to all.

What is Gram Nyayalayas Scheme?

- Gram Nyayalayas were established for speedy and easy access to the justice system in the rural areas across the country.
- The Gram Nyayalayas Act came into force on October 2, 2009.
- In terms of Section 3(1) of the Act, it is for the State Governments to establish Gram Nyayalayas in consultation with the respective High Courts.
- The Act authorizes Gram Nyayalaya to hold a mobile court outside its headquarters.
- Some major reasons behind the non-enforcement include financial constraints, the reluctance of lawyers, police and other government officials.

Features of the Gram Nyayalayas

- Gram Nyayalaya is established generally at headquarter of every Panchayat at the intermediate level or a group of contiguous panchayat in a district where there is no panchayat at an intermediate level.
- The Gram Nyayalayas are presided over by a Nyayadhikari, who will have the same power, enjoy the same salary and benefits of a Judicial Magistrate of First Class.
- Such Nyayadhikari is to be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.

Jurisdiction

- A Gram Nyayalaya have jurisdiction over an area specified by a notification by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.
- The Court can function as a mobile court at any place within the jurisdiction of such Gram Nyayalaya, after giving wide publicity to that regard.
- The Gram Nyayalayas **have both civil and criminal jurisdiction** over the offences and nature of suits specified in the First, Second and Third schedule of the Act.
- The pecuniary jurisdiction of the Nyayalayas are fixed by the respective High Courts.
- Appeals in criminal matter can be made to the Sessions Court in the respective jurisdiction and in civil matters to the District Court within a period of one month from the date of judgment.

Trials

- Gram Nyayalayas can follow special procedures in civil matters, in a manner it deem just and reasonable in the interest of justice.
- Civil suits are proceeded on a day-to-day basis, with limited adjournments and are to be disposed of within a period of six months from the date of institution of the suit.
- In execution of a decree, the Court can allow special procedures following rules of natural justice.
- Gram Nyayalayas allow for conciliation of the dispute and settlement of the same in the first instance.
- They have been given the power to accept certain evidence which would otherwise not be acceptable under the Indian Evidence Act.

5. Commission for Sub-categorization within OBCs gets another extension

The Union Cabinet has approved of the term of the Commission constituted under Article 340 of the Constitution to examine the issue of Sub-categorization within Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the Central List.

What is the Sub-categorization of OBCs?

- OBCs are granted 27% reservation in jobs and education under the central government.
- In September 2020, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court reopened the legal debate on the sub-categorization of SCs and STs for reservations.
- The debate arises out of the perception that only a few affluent communities among over 2,600 included in the Central List of OBCs have secured a major part of this 27% reservation.

Need for sub-categorization

- The argument for sub-categorization – or creating categories within OBCs for reservation – is that it would ensure “equitable distribution” of representation among all OBC communities.
- To examine this, the Rohini Commission was constituted on October 2, 2017.
- At that time, it was given 12 weeks to submit its report but has been given several extensions since, the latest one being the 10th.
- Before the Rohini Commission was set up, the Centre had granted constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).

Why so many extensions are being given?

- In process of preparing the sub-categorized central list of OBCs, the Commission has noted several ambiguities in the list as it stands now.
- The Commission is of the opinion that these have to be clarified/rectified before the sub-categorised central list is prepared.
- A hurdle for the Commission has been the absence of data for the population of various communities to compare with their representation in jobs and admissions.
- Many groups of OBCs have been demanding enumeration of OBCs in the Census.

6. Dismissal of govt employees: What the Constitution says

Lt Governor has dismissed 11 Jammu and Kashmir government employees for alleged terror links under provisions of Article 311(2)(c) of the Constitution.

What is Article 311?

- Article 311 of the Constitution deals with 'Dismissal, removal or reduction in rank of persons employed in civil capacities under the Union or a State'.
- Under Article 311(2), no civil servant can be "dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which he has been informed of the charges and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges".
- Subsection (c) of the provision, however, says this clause shall not apply "where the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of the State it is not expedient to hold such inquiry".

Remedy available

- The only available remedy to a terminated employee is to challenge the government's decision in the High Court.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

7. The proposed e-commerce rules shield vested interests

Context

The proposed Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, have been drafted ostensibly in the name of the consumer. The rules are driven more by the desire to shield the traditional brick-and-mortar stores, and handicap e-commerce firms, especially the foreign ones.

Issues with the provisions of draft Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020

1) Fall-back liability clause is unfair for those operating through marketplace model

- Under this provision, e-commerce entities will be **liable in case suppliers on the platform fail to deliver the goods** to consumers, causing them a loss.
- E-commerce firms in India operate through either the **inventory model or the marketplace model**.
- As FDI is permitted **only in the marketplace model**.
- Under the marketplace model, e-commerce platforms don't hold inventory, but simply connect buyers and sellers.
- **Foreign players typically operate through this model**.
- Considering that these platforms exercise little or no control over the inventory under this model, how can they be held liable for the sellers' actions.

2) Identifying goods based on country of origin and providing fair opportunity to domestic sellers

- The draft rules also require e-commerce platforms to identify goods **based on their country of origin**.
- And when goods are being viewed for purchase by consumers, the rules also mandate platforms to provide suggestions to ensure **"fair opportunity" for domestic sellers**.
- This raises the question as to why the **Make in India campaign** is being **pushed through the Consumer Protection Act**.
- Surely, **if domestic manufacturers are competitive**, consumers will automatically gravitate towards them.
- **Interests of consumers**, not domestic manufacturers, should be at the core of the consumer protection framework.

3) Overlapping/competing jurisdictions

- **Data protection:** The draft rules have sought to safeguard consumer data by restraining e-commerce firms from sharing consumer data without consent.
- But the data protection should be governed by the provisions under the Personal Data Protection Bill and not the Consumer Protection Act.
- Considering the graded approach that is likely to be adopted under the Data Protection Bill, **an e-commerce user's data could be classified as per its vulnerability** and be left under the jurisdiction of the data protection authority.

- **Dominant position:** The rules also state that e-commerce entities are prohibited from abusing their **dominant positions in the market**.
- The “**abuse of dominant position**” has been given the same meaning as that prescribed under Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2002.
- This will open the scope for new consumer protection authority to enter into issues of abuse of dominant position – the domain of the **Competition Commission of India**.

Conclusion

The lines of demarcation that have been drawn up in the retail landscape – single brand vs multi-brand, online vs offline, domestic vs foreign – serve only to protect powerful vested interests, not benefit the consumer as is often proclaimed.

8. Amnesty Scheme for violators of Environment Norms

The union environment ministry has put together an amnesty scheme for infrastructure and industrial projects that have violated environmental clearance (EC) norms for Environment Impact Assessment.

What is the Scheme?

The new amnesty scheme empowers regulatory institutions at both central and state levels:

(1) To identify and report cases of violation

- It refers to identify, examine and appraise violation projects, refraining from causing further environmental damage and also compensating for causing damage to the environment.

(2) To take action against violators in terms of closure or demolition of a project

- It defines three different actions to be taken for the violation projects depending upon their EC status.
- In case the project has not obtained EC, it will be ordered to close its operations.
- If the project has undergone expansion without obtaining EC for the expanded portion, it will be ordered to revert the activity/production to the limit granted in the existing EC.

(3) To levy penalty on them that is akin to the scale of the project

- It entitles the regulatory authorities to levy penalties on the proponent, in addition to the bank guarantee.

Issues with the scheme

- There is also no established procedure to ensure that the complaints made against the violator are not dismissed without hearing.
- This ambiguity in the memorandum leaves scope for a less transparent redressal mechanism.
- The penalties suggested could be termed as legitimating non-compliance.

Criticisms

- Environmental experts argue that such a move to regularise projects, irrespective of size, scale or impact, is purely a political move.
- They regarded this move as weakening the EIA process.
- This will be the largest regularization scheme for projects that have operated illegally in India and added to our total environmental and social burdens.
- Thousands of projects operate in different states without any environmental approval.

Way forward

- Looking at the plethora of violation cases it is imperative to develop such a mechanism.
- However, we should not compromise the existing environmental regulations and adopt a 'zero tolerance for violation'.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

1. It was established on the recommendations of B.Sivaraman Committee by an Act of the Parliament.
2. NABARD is wholly owned by the Government of India.

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 : c

- The Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar has recently addressed the 40th foundation day of NABARD.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

- It was established on 12 July 1982 by an Act of the Parliament.
- NABARD is wholly owned by the Government of India.
- NABARD, as a Development Bank, is mandated for providing and regulating credit and other facilities for the promotion and development of agriculture, small scale industries, cottage and village industries, handicrafts and other rural crafts and other allied economic activities in rural areas with a view to promoting integrated rural development and securing prosperity of rural areas, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- It aims to promote sustainable and equitable agriculture and rural development through participative financial and non-financial interventions, innovations, technology and institutional development for securing prosperity.

2. “Cairo Consensus” deals with:

- a. Population dynamics, family planning and reproductive health
- b. Exploration and use of outer space
- c. Navigational rights and freedoms
- d. Special use airspace

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Cairo Consensus adopted in the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 called for the promotion of reproductive rights, empowering women, universal education, maternal and infant health to tackle the challenge of poverty and high fertility.

3. Pulichintala project has been a source of interstate water dispute between which of these states?

- a. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu
- b. Andhra Pradesh and Odisha
- c. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- d. Odisha and Chhattisgarh

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Pulichintala Project is a multipurpose project serving irrigation needs, hydropower generation and flood control. It is constructed across river Krishna near Pulichinta Village.
- It has been a source of interstate water dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

4. Which of the given statements is/are INCORRECT?

1. India has set a target of installing 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022.
2. India's renewable energy target includes installing 100 GW of solar power.
3. India's largest floating solar project has been commissioned at Chennai.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- India's largest floating solar project has been commissioned at Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Its capacity is 10 MW.

5. Which of the given statements is/are correct?

1. Satras are monastic institutions created as part of the Neo-Vaishnavite reformist movement started by Srimanta Sankaradeva.
2. Satras propagate the 'worship through art' approach.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Satras are institutional centres associated with the Ekasarana tradition of Vaishnavism, largely found in the Indian state of Assam.
- These monastic institutions were created as part of the Neo-Vaishnavite reformist movement by Srimanta Sankaradeva.

- Satras were established as centres of religious, social and cultural reforms. Satras promulgate Sankaradeva's unique "worship through art" approach with music (borgeet), dance (sattriya) and theatre (bhauna).

6. In the context of which one of the following are the terms pyrolysis and plasma gasification mentioned?

- a. Extraction of earth element
- b. Natural gas extractions technologies
- c. Hydrogen fuel based automobiles
- d. Waste to energy technologies

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Pyrolysis and Plasma gasification are associated with waste to energy technologies.
- Pyrolysis is the heating of an organic material, such as biomass, in the absence of oxygen. Because no oxygen is present the material does not combust but the chemical compounds (i.e. cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin) that make up that material thermally decompose into combustible gases and charcoal.
- Plasma gasification is an extreme thermal process using plasma which converts organic matter into a syngas which is primarily made up of hydrogen and carbon monoxide. A plasma torch powered by an electric arc is used to ionize gas and catalyze organic matter into syngas, with slag remaining as a byproduct. Plasma gasification is an emerging technology which can process landfill waste to extract commodity recyclables and convert carbon-based materials into fuels.

Mains Practice Questions

1. The accountability mechanisms are needed to keep pace with developments of modern government structures. Discuss (250 words)

Approach

- In the introduction part define the term accountability.
- Explain the significance of accountability in modern government structures.
- Briefly discuss the various dimensions of accountability with respect to institutions.
- Conclude by giving a suitable way forward suggesting measures to further increase accountability.

2. Mission Karmayogi is aimed at building a future-ready civil service with the right attitude, skills and knowledge, aligned to the vision of New India. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce by writing about Mission Karmayogi.
- Examine the benefits of the mission in building a future-ready civil service.
- Discuss the challenges in achieving the objectives of the Mission Karmayogi.
- Conclude suitably on a positive note.

