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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Surveillance and human rights

Context

The Pegasus revelations reflect an attack on Indian democracy and Indian citizens.

Role of government in protecting the fundamental and human rights of citizens

- The surveillance of the target group in India through Pegasus raises doubts about the functioning of democracy in India.
- **Constitutional duty of government:** The government has a constitutional duty to protect the fundamental and human rights of its citizens, irrespective of who they are.
- There is clear evidence that the **rule of law has been undermined**.
- More evidently, this reflects extremely **poor governance**.
- The Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing, and the National Security Council Secretariat should have forewarned the government and citizens against such surveillance **seriously violating privacy and fundamental rights**.
- The Supreme Court, in **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**, declared privacy a constitutionally protected value.

Violation of human rights

- India is a signatory to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.
- **Article 12** provides that everyone has the right to the protection of the law against arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.
- **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, also signed by India, in Article 17 states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."
- In K.S. Puttaswamy, the Supreme Court noted India's commitments under international law and held that by virtue of **Article 51** of the Constitution, India has to endeavour to "foster respect for international law and treaty obligations..."

- **The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993** is a fallout of this commitment.

Recommendations on digital communication technologies

- The annual report of the **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in 2014** made recommendations on “digital communications technologies”.
- **Judicial oversight:** The UNHCHR report stated, judicial involvement that meets international standards can help to make it more likely that the overall **statutory regime will meet the minimum standards** that international human rights law requires.
- At the same time, the report stated that judicial involvement in oversight should not be viewed as a panacea.
- **Independent body:** The report also recommended an **independent oversight body** to keep checks.
- **Effective remedy to victim:** The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires states parties to ensure that victims of violations of the Covenant have an effective remedy.
- **Role of business:** The report also dealt with the role of businesses and stated that when a state requires that an information and communications technology company provide user data, it can only supply it in respect of legitimate reasons.
- Earlier, due to concerns of member states, the General Assembly adopted **Resolution 68/167** affirming that **rights held by people offline must also be protected online**.
- The resolution also called upon all states to respect and protect the right to privacy, including in digital communication.

Conclusion

Indians have a right to call upon NSO to terminate the agreement, if any, with the Indian government or any private player and to cooperate with citizens to unravel the truth.

2. Preventive detention a necessary evil: Supreme Court

Preventive detention, the dreaded power of the State to restrain a person without trial, could be used only to prevent public disorder, the Supreme Court held in a judgment.

What is Preventive Detention?

- Preventive detention means detaining a person so that to prevent that person from committing on any possible crime.
- In other words, preventive detention is an action taken by the administration on the grounds of the suspicion that some wrong actions may be done by the person concerned which will be prejudicial to the state.

PD in India

A police officer can arrest an individual without orders from a Magistrate and without any warrant if he gets any information that such an individual can commit any offense.

- **Preventive Detention Law, 1950:** According to this law any person could be arrested and detained if his freedom would endanger the security of the country, foreign relations, public interests, or otherwise necessary for the country.
- **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) 1968:** Within the ambit of UAPA law the Indian State could declare any organization illegal and could imprison anyone for interrogation if the said organization or person critiqued/questioned Indian sovereignty territorially.

What is the difference between preventive detention and an arrest?

- An 'arrest' is done when a person is charged with a crime.
- In the case of preventive detention, a person is detained as he/she is simply restricted from doing something that might deteriorate the law-and-order situation.
- Article 22 of the Indian Constitution provides protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.

Rights of an Arrested Person in India

A/c to Article 22(1) and 22(2) of the Indian constitution:

- A person cannot be arrested and detained without being informed why he is being arrested.
- A person who is arrested cannot be denied to be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. This means that the arrested person has right to hire a legal practitioner to defend himself/ herself.
- Every person who has been arrested would be produced before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours.

- The custody of the detained person cannot be beyond the said period by the authority of magistrate.

Exceptions for Preventive Detention

Article 22(3) says that the above safeguards are not available to the following:

- If the person is at the time being an enemy alien
- If the person is arrested under certain law made for the purpose of “Preventive Detention”

Constitutional provision

- It is extraordinary that the framers of the Indian Constitution, who suffered most because of the Preventive Detention Laws, did not hesitate to give Constitutional sanctity.
- B.R. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the freedom of the individual should not supersede the interests of the state.
- He had also stated that the independence of the country was in a state of infancy and in order to save it, preventive detention was essential.

Issues with preventive detention

- **Arbitrariness:** The police determinations of whether a person poses a threat are not tested at a trial by leading evidence or examined by legally trained persons.
- **Rights violation:** Quiet often, there is no trial (upto 3 months), no periodic review, and no legal assistance for the detained person.
- **Abuse:** It does not provide any procedural protections such as to reduce detainees’ vulnerability to torture and discriminatory treatment, and to prevent officials’ misusing preventive detention for subversive activities.
- **Tool for suppression:** In the absence of proper safeguards, preventive detention has been misused, particularly against the Dalits and the minorities.

What has the apex court recently rule?

- Preventive detention is a necessary evil only to prevent public disorder.
- The court must ensure that the facts brought before it directly and inevitably lead to harm, danger or alarm, or feeling of insecurity among the general public or any section thereof at large.
- The State should not arbitrarily resort to “preventive detention” to deal with all and sundry “law and order” problems, which could be dealt with by the ordinary laws of the country.

- Whenever an order under a preventive detention law is challenged, one of the questions the court must ask in deciding its legality is: was the ordinary law of the land sufficient to deal with the situation?
- If the answer is in the affirmative, the detention order will be illegal.

Upholding the Article 21

- Preventive detention must fall within the four corners of Article 21 (due process of law) read with Article 22 (safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention) and the statute in question, Justice Nariman ruled.
- The Liberty of a citizen is a most important right won by our forefathers after long, historical, and arduous struggles.

Conclusion

- The constitutional philosophy of personal liberty is an idealistic view, the curtailment of liberty for reasons of State's security; public order, disruption of national economic discipline, etc.
- They are envisaged as a necessary evil to be administered under strict constitutional restrictions.
- India is a large country and many separatist tendencies against the national security and integrity existed and existing and a strict law is required to counter the subversive activities.
- The number of persons detained in these acts is not a very large and due attention is made before preventive detention.
- Having such kind of acts has a restraining influence on the anti-social and subversive elements.
- The state should have very effective powers to deal with the acts in which the citizens involve in hostile activities, espionage, coercion, terrorism, etc.

3. Halam Sub-tribes Clash

Why in News

People of Halam sub-tribes, who took refuge in Assam following **clashes with Bru refugees in north Tripura**, are returning to their village Damcherra in North district of Tripura.

- The **Bru** came to Tripura in 1997 to escape an ethnic clash in Mizoram and started staying at six relief camps in the North District.

Key Points

- **Halam Sub-tribes:**
 - Ethnically, **Halam communities (categorised as a scheduled tribe in Tripura) belong to the Kuki-Chin tribes of Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group.**
 - Their **language** is also more or less **similar to that of the Tibeto-Burman family.**
 - Halams are also known as **Mila Kuki**, though they are not at all Kukis in terms of language, culture and living style.
 - Halams are divided into **several sub-clans** which are referred to as **“Barki-Halam”**.
 - Major sub-clans of Halams are Koloi, Korbong, Kaipeng, Bong, Sakachep, Thangachep, Molsom, Rupini, Rangkhawl, Chorai, Lankai, Kaireng (Darlong), Ranglong, Marchafang and Saihmar.
 - As per **2011 Census**, their total **population is 57,210 and distributed throughout the State.**
 - Halams live in typical **"Tong Ghar"** specially made of **bamboo and Chan grass**. Apart from plain land cultivation they still practice **Jhum cultivation** and depend on both the activities beside other substitute works.
- **Bru Refugees:**
 - **Bru or Reang** is a community **indigenous to Northeast India**, living mostly in **Tripura, Mizoram and Assam**. In **Tripura**, they are recognised as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group**.
 - In **Mizoram**, they have been **targeted by groups** that do not consider them indigenous to the state.
 - In 1997, following ethnic clashes, nearly 37,000 Brus fled Mamit, Kolasib and Lunglei districts of Mizoram and were accommodated in relief camps in Tripura.
 - Damcherra is Tripura’s last village before the inter-state boundary with Mizoram.
 - Since then, 5,000 have returned to Mizoram in eight phases of repatriation, while 32,000 still live in six relief camps in North Tripura.
 - In June **2018**, community leaders from the **Bru camps signed an agreement with the Centre and the two state governments**, providing for repatriation in Mizoram. But **most camp residents rejected the terms** of the agreement.
 - In January **2020**, the **Centre, the governments of Mizoram and Tripura and leaders of Bru organisations signed a quadripartite agreement.**
 - Under the pact, the Home Ministry has committed to incur the whole expenditure of settlement in Tripura.

- A package was assured in the accord that each refugee family would get:
 - A plot, fixed deposit of Rs. 4 lakh, free ration and a monthly stipend of Rs. 5,000 for two years.
 - In addition, each family will also be provided Rs. 1.5 lakh to construct a house.
- **Related Issues:**
 - The **northeast has had a history of ethnic conflicts** – not only between the “indigenous” and “settlers” but inter-tribe too – and issues could also arise within smaller sub-groups within the same tribe.
 - The **decision to settle Bru Tribal People in Tripura could also throw up questions of citizenship, specifically in Assam** where a process is on to define who is indigenous and who is not.
 - The move on the Brus **legitimises the settlement of foreigners under Citizenship (Amendment) Act** too, creating conflicts with the indigenous people as well as communities that settled earlier.
 - It could also lead to **loss of space and revenue for other communities in Tripura**.
 - Further, the inter-state border disputes have come under fresh focus after the recent violent clash on **Assam-Mizoram border**.

Way Forward

- Considering the present conditions of Brus, the state government should ensure that the **quadrilateral agreement is enforced in letter and spirit**.
- However, the same agreement which provides for resettlement of Bru refugees in Tripura **should be implemented keeping in mind the interests of non-Brus**, so that no conflict emerges between the Bru and non-Bru communities.

4. HC allows woman to terminate pregnancy

Context:

The Delhi High Court has permitted a woman to undergo medical termination of her 22-week pregnancy as the foetus was suffering from serious abnormalities.

- The woman, who completed 22 weeks of gestation period, had sought permission to undergo medical termination of her pregnancy as her foetus was suffering from various defects and abnormalities.

Details:

- In India, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act **stipulated a ceiling of 20 weeks for termination of pregnancy.**
- Earlier, beyond the stipulated 20 weeks, abortion of a foetus was statutorily impermissible.
- The **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill (MTP), 2021** received the president's assent and was notified by the Central government on March 25, 2021.
- The amendment has now allowed **abortion to be conducted within 20 weeks on one doctor's advice and between 20 and 24 weeks on two doctors' advice for specific categories of women, including victims of rape (although excluding marital rape).**

5. We need more creators

The article talks about the need for educators to upgrade their engagement strategies while integrating technology into their approach.

Concerns:

The disruptive nature of digital tools has thrown up interesting challenges to the traditional education system.

Details:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has rightfully identified 21st-century skills as fundamental to developing creators.
- Relying on traditional literacy and numeracy alone will not be enough.
- It tends to marginalise differently-abled learners.
- Constant engagement, an emotional connect, and immersive learning are important parts of education.
- Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural interactions, and productivity and accountability all strengthen the individuals' abilities at the workplace.

Using technology:

- EdTech apps can deliver content that caters to multiple learning styles, learning curves and pace of learning.
- The pandemic has shown that traditional teacher and brick-and-mortar schools may become obsolete if radical pedagogical changes are not made.

Issues:

- With the pandemic shutting down schools, children have lost all personal contact with their social group and parents are forced to rely upon technology to provide their children constant gratification to keep them engaged.
- Over-reliance on technology comes at a cost.
- Technology tools are forcing human beings to remain consumers rather than become creators.
- Technology cannot replace emotional and social engagement.

Way Forward:

- The policymakers will have to look again at the school education system if 21st-century skills are to be truly actualised.
- Educators could consider a design-based approach where students concentrate on a subject for two-three weeks to examine how it can be applied in the real world.
- Educators will have to find ways to upgrade their engagement strategies.
- They must integrate technology into their approach through hybrid learning.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

6. Experts raise concerns over mandatory food fortification

In a pushback against the Centre's plan to mandatorily fortify rice and edible oils with vitamins and minerals, a group of scientists and activists have warned of the adverse impacts on health and livelihoods.

Food Fortification

- Food fortification is defined as the practice of adding vitamins and minerals to commonly consumed foods during processing to increase their nutritional value.
- It is a proven, safe and cost-effective strategy for improving diets and for the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies.

Types of food fortification

Food fortification can also be categorized according to the stage of addition:

1. **Commercial and industrial fortification** (wheat flour, cornmeal, cooking oils)
2. **Biofortification** (breeding crops to increase their nutritional value, which can include both conventional selective breeding, and genetic engineering)
3. **Home fortification** (example: vitamin D drops)

Advantages offered

- **Health:** Fortified staple foods will contain natural or near-natural levels of micro-nutrients, which may not necessarily be the case with supplements.
- **Taste:** It provides nutrition without any change in the characteristics of food or the course of our meals.
- **Nutrition:** If consumed on a regular and frequent basis, fortified foods will maintain body stores of nutrients more efficiently and more effectively than will intermittently supplement.
- **Economy:** The overall costs of fortification are extremely low; the price increase is approximately 1 to 2 percent of the total food value.
- **Society:** It upholds everyone's right to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger

Issues with fortified food

- **Against nature:** Fortification and enrichment upset nature's packaging. Our body does not absorb individual nutrients added to processed foods as efficiently compared to nutrients naturally occurring.
- **Bioavailability:** Supplements added to foods are less bioavailable. Bioavailability refers to the proportion of a nutrient your body is able to absorb and use.
- **Immunity issues:** They lack immune-boosting substances.
- **Over-nutrition:** Fortified foods and supplements can pose specific risks for people who are taking prescription medications, including decreased absorption of other micro-nutrients, treatment failure, and increased mortality risk.

7. Demand for Import of Genetically Modified Soy Seeds

Why in News

The **poultry industry is demanding** a permit for the **import of crushed genetically modified (GM) soy seeds for captive consumption of farmers** from the Central government.

- **Non-fiscal and fiscal relief measures** which include the restructuring of term loans and additional working capital **has also been demanded** from the Centre and State governments.

Key Points

- **GM Crops:**
 - A **GM or transgenic crop** is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.
 - For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination.
 - **Conventional plant breeding** involves crossing of species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
 - Genus is a class of items such as a group of animals or plants with similar traits, qualities or features.
 - **Cross breeding** can take a long time to achieve desired results and frequently, characteristics of interest do not exist in any related species.
 - **Bt cotton** is the **only GM crop that is allowed in India**. It has alien genes from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest **pink bollworm**.
 - **Herbicide Tolerant Bt (Ht Bt) cotton**, on the other hand is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium, which allows the plant to resist the common herbicide glyphosate.
 - In **Bt brinjal**, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borers.
 - In **DMH-11 mustard**, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.
- **Status of GM Soyseeds in India:**
 - India allows the import of **GM soybean and canola oil**.
 - Import of **GM soya bean seeds** has not been approved in India.
 - The main fear is that import of GM soya bean will **affect the Indian soya bean industry by contaminating non-GM varieties**.

- **Reasons for the Demand:**
 - The outbreak of **Covid-19** has created a massive crisis which led to an **initial depletion of demand in chicken products** owing to false news about the linkage between the virus and poultry products.
 - This created an **unwarranted financial crisis** and led to the erosion of **working capital (used for day-to-day operations)**.
 - Since the last several months, high speculation activities in soya contracts on **National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX)** has been disturbing the sector.
 - The NCDEX is an online commodities exchange dealing primarily in agricultural commodities in India.
 - The **rise in the soybean process** had led to the **skyrocketing of prices of eggs and chicken products** in the retail market.
 - The import for the particular time frame will stabilise the raw material market.
- **Approval Process for GM crops in India:**
 - In India, the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** is the apex body that **allows for commercial release of GM crops**.
 - Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a **jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs. 1 lakh** under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
 - **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** is the authorised body to **regulate the imported crops in India**.
- **Some Related Initiatives:**
 - **Poultry Venture Capital Fund (PVCF):**
 - The **Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying** is implementing it under **“Entrepreneurship development and Employment generation” (EDEG)** of the **National Livestock Mission**.
 - It is a bankable programme and the Central Government is providing subsidy through **National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD)** for those beneficiaries taking loan for PVCF.
 - **National Livestock Mission:**
 - Different programmes under the **National Livestock Mission** under which financial assistance is provided to States/Union Territories for implementation of **Rural Backyard Poultry Development (RBPD)** and **Innovative Poultry Productivity Project (IPPP)**.
 - **Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD) Scheme:**
 - ASCAD under **“Livestock Health and Disease Control” (LH&DC)** which covers the **vaccination of economically important poultry diseases viz., Ranikhet Disease, Infectious**

Bursal Disease, Fowl Pox etc., including control and containment of emergent and exotic diseases like Avian Influenza.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Pakistan grants statehood to Gilgit-Baltistan

Pakistan has finalized draft legislation to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan, the region known before 2009 as Northern Areas, as a province of the country.

Gilgit-Baltistan: History of the region

- Gilgit was part of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir but was ruled directly by the British, who had taken it on lease from Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of the Muslim-majority state.
- When Hari Singh acceded to India on October 26, 1947, the Gilgit Scouts rose in rebellion, led by their British commander Major William Alexander Brown.
- The Gilgit Scouts also moved to take over Baltistan, which was then part of Ladakh, and captured Skardu, Kargil and Dras.
- In battles thereafter, Indian forces retook Kargil and Dras in August 1948.

Accession with Pakistan

- In November, 1947, a political outfit called the Revolutionary Council of Gilgit-Baltistan had proclaimed the independent state of Gilgit-Baltistan.
- It declared GB was acceding to Pakistan only to the extent of full administrative control, choosing to govern it directly under the Frontier Crimes Regulation.
- It was a law devised by the British to keep control of the restive tribal areas of the northwest.
- Following the India-Pakistan ceasefire of January 1, 1949, Pakistan entered into an agreement with the “provisional government” of “Azad Jammu & Kashmir”.
- Much of its parts had been occupied by Pakistani troops and irregulars and were later taken over by Pak defence and foreign affairs.
- Under this agreement, the AJK government also ceded administration of Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan.

Not being incorporated as a province

- In 1974, Pakistan adopted its first full-fledged civilian Constitution, which lists four provinces – Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan were not incorporated as provinces.
- One reason ascribed to this is that Pakistan did not want to undermine its international case that the resolution of the Kashmir issue had to be in accordance with UN resolutions that called for a plebiscite.
- In 1975, PoK got its own Constitution, making it an ostensibly self-governed autonomous territory.
- This Constitution had no jurisdiction over the Northern Areas, which continued to be administered directly by Islamabad (the Frontier Crimes Regulation was discontinued in 1997)
- In reality, PoK too remained under the control of Pakistani federal administration and the security establishment, through the Kashmir Council.

Reasons behind

- The main difference was that while the people of PoK had rights and freedoms guaranteed by their own Constitution, which mirrors the Pakistan Constitution.
- However the people of the minority Shia-dominated Northern Areas did not have any political representation.
- Although they were considered Pakistani, including for citizenship and passports, they were outside the ambit of constitutional protections available to those in the four provinces and PoK.

Why GB is in focus now?

- Pakistan began considering changes to its administrative arrangements with increasing Chinese involvement in strategic development ventures.
- GB was vital to those projects, given that it provides only land access between the two countries.
- Since 2009, it has had a namesake legislative assembly.

Suppression of a movement

- There is anger against Pakistan for unleashing sectarian militant groups that target Shias, but the predominant sentiment is that all this will improve once they are part of the Pakistani federation.
- There is a small movement for independence, but it has very little traction. Some factions argue for its accession with India.

- While some reports have suggested that Pakistan's decision is under pressure from China, wary that Gilgit-Baltistan's ambiguous status might undermine the legality of its projects there.

Significance for India

- Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of India by virtue of the legal, complete and irrevocable accession of Jammu & Kashmir to the Union of India in 1947.
- The area's strategic importance for India has increased in light of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor agreement.
- India is also concerned of a two-front war (with China as well as Pakistan) after the standoff in Eastern Ladakh last year.

2. Solution for disruption of Parliament: More working days

Context

Last week, a newspaper reported that the government is considering curtailing the monsoon session of Parliament on account of disruptions.

Reasons for disruptions

- In 2001, a day-long conference was held in the Central Hall of Parliament to discuss discipline and decorum in legislatures.
- The inputs of participants of conference helped identify four reasons behind the disorderly conduct by MPs.
- **Inadequate time:** The first was dissatisfaction in MPs because of inadequate time for airing their grievances.
- **Unresponsive attitude:** The second was an unresponsive attitude of the government and the retaliatory posture of the treasury benches.
- **Adherence to norm:** The third was political parties not adhering to parliamentary norms and disciplining their members.
- **Lack of action:** The absence of prompt action against disrupting MPs under the legislature's rules.

Suggestions

- **Enforcement of a code of conduct** for MPs and MLAs: The Lok Sabha has had a simple code of conduct for its MPs since 1952.
- Newer forms of protest led to the updating of these rules in 1989.

- Accordingly, members should not shout slogans, display placards, tear away documents in protest, play cassettes or tape recorders in the House.
- A new rule empowers the Lok Sabha Speaker **to suspend MPs obstructing the Houses' business automatically.**
- But these suggestions **have not been enforced so far.**
- **Increase in working days:** As recommended by the 2001 conference, there should be an increase in the working days of Parliament.
- The conference had also resolved that Parliament should meet for **110 days every year** and larger state **legislative assemblies for 90 days.**
- Successive governments have **shied away from increasing the working days of Parliament.**
- Our legislature **should meet throughout the year**, like parliaments of most developed democracies.
- **The concept of opposition days:** In the United Kingdom, where Parliament meets over 100 days a year, opposition parties get 20 days on which they decide the agenda for discussion in Parliament.
- The main opposition party gets 17 days and the remaining three days are given to the second-largest opposition party.
- Canada also has a similar concept of opposition days.
- This can also be done in India.

Conclusion

More strengthening of our Parliament is the solution to prevent disruption of its proceedings. It is the only mechanism to ensure that disrupting its proceedings or allowing them to be disrupted ceases to be a viable option.

3. Making a case for Indo-Abrahamic accord

Context

An Egyptian scholar, Mohammed Soliman, has recently written about the significance of what he calls the emerging “Indo-Abrahamic Accord” and its trans-regional implications to the west of India.

About Abraham Accord

- Abraham Accord, signed in August last year in Washington, signifies the normalisation of Israel's relations with the UAE and Bahrain.
- The UAE and Bahrain were followed by Sudan and Morocco in signing the Abraham Accords.

- Although Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) had established diplomatic relations with Israel earlier, the Abraham Accords are widely seen as making a definitive **breakthrough in the relations between Israel and the Arabs.**

Factors in favour of accord

- **Depth of trilateral relationship:** Although India had relations with UAE and Israel for many years, they certainly have acquired political depth and strategic character recently.
- **Converging interests:** Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's assertive claims for the leadership of the Islamic world and hostile stand against India on several issues, indicates converging interests between India, the UAE, and Israel.
- One of the unintended consequences of Erdogan's overweening regional ambition, his alienation of Israel as well as moderate Arabs, his conflict with Greece, and his embrace of Pakistan is the **extraordinary opportunity for India** to widen India's reach to the west of the Subcontinent
- **Cooperation:** There are many areas like defence, aerospace and digital innovation where the three countries can pool their resources and coordinate development policies.
- **India's extended neighbourhood:** The notion of a "Greater Middle East" can provide a huge fillip to India's engagement with the extended neighbourhood to the west.

India-Turkey relations

- **Hostile approach on Kashmir:** Turkey has been championing Pakistan's case on Kashmir after India changed the territorial status quo of the state in August 2019.
- **Blocking NSG entry:** At Pakistan's behest, Turkey is also blocking India's entry into the **Nuclear Suppliers Group.**
- The new geopolitical churn is also driven by Pakistan's growing alignment with Turkey and **its alienation** from its traditionally strong supporters in the Arab Gulf – the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Opportunities for India in extended neighbourhood to the west

- **Relations with Greece:** The renewed territorial disputes between Turkey and Greece, and Turkey's quest for regional dominance has drawn Greece and the UAE closer.
- Greece has also looked towards India **to enhance bilateral security cooperation.**

- Greece's European partners like France, which have a big stake in the Mediterranean as well as the Arab Gulf, have taken an active interest in countering Turkey's regional ambitions.
- Erdogan's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which seeks to overthrow the current political order in the region, has deeply angered the governments of **Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.**
- **India's relations with Egypt:** If there is one country that can give substantive depth to the Indo-Abrahamic Accord it is Egypt.
- Located at the cusp of Mediterranean Europe, Africa, and Asia, Egypt is the very **heart of the Greater Middle East.**
- Independent India's engagement with the region in the 1950s was centred on a close partnership with Egypt.
- If Delhi and Cairo lost each other in recent decades, India can rebuild the strategic partnership jointly with the Egypt government which is calling for the construction of a "New Republic" in Egypt.
- The notion of a "Greater Middle East" can provide a huge fillip to India's engagement with the extended neighbourhood to the west.
- The familiar regional institutions like the **Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** might endure but are incapable of addressing the region's contradictions.

Conclusion

The opportunities that are coming India's way to the west of the Subcontinent are as consequential as those that have recently emerged in the east.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Haldibari- Chilahati Rail Link

The freight trains have started commuting via the restored Haldibari (India) - Chilahati (Bangladesh) rail link.

Haldibari- Chilahati Rail Link

- The Haldibari - Chilahati rail link between India and then East Pakistan was operational till 1965.
- The distance between Haldibari Railway Station till the international border is 4.5 km, while that of Chilahati is around 7.5 km till the 'zero points'.

- This was part of the Broad-Gauge main route from Kolkata to Siliguri during the partition.
- Trains traveling to Assam and North Bengal continued to travel through the then East Pakistan territory even after partition.
- However, the war of 1965 effectively cut off all the railway links between India and then East Pakistan.
- The link was reopened in 2020 for the movement of passenger and goods traffic.

Other railway links between India and Bangladesh

As of now, five links connecting India with Bangladesh have been made operational which include:

- Petrapole (India) – Benapole (Bangladesh)
- Gede (India) – Darshana (Bangladesh)
- Singhabad (India) – Rohanpur (Bangladesh)
- Radhikapur (India) – Birol (Bangladesh)
- Haldibari (India) – Chilahati (Bangladesh)

5. Kuthiran Tunnel

The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has inaugurated the Kuthiran Tunnel in Kerala

Kuthiran Tunnel

- Kuthiran Tunnel is a Twin-tube tunnel at Kuthiran in Thrissur District of Kerala.
- It is located on National Highway 544, owned and operated by the National Highways Authority of India.
- It is Kerala's first-ever tunnel for road transport and South India's Longest 6-lane road tunnel.
- Kuthiran gradient is situated in the Kuthiran Hills, situated in the western part of Anaimalai Hills. The hills are a notified Peechi- Vazahani wildlife sanctuary.
- It will drastically improve connectivity to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The road will improve connectivity to important ports and towns in North-South Corridor without endangering wildlife.

6. Skyglow: Light Pollution

Why in News

A recent study has shown that the Skyglow forces dung beetles in the city to abandon the Milky Way as their compass, they rely instead on earthbound artificial lights as beacons.

Key Points

- **About Skyglow:**
 - The Skyglow, is an **omnipresent sheet of light across the night sky in and around cities that can block all but the very brightest stars from view.**
 - The **brightening of the night sky** over inhabited areas because of streetlights, security floodlights and outdoor ornamental lights **cause the Skyglow.**
 - This **light floods directly into the eyes of the Nocturnal** (active at night) and also into the skies and misleads their path.
 - 'Skyglow' is **one of the components of light pollution.**
- **Light Pollution:**
 - **About:**
 - The **inappropriate or excessive use of artificial light** - known as Light Pollution (LP) - can have serious environmental consequences for humans, wildlife, and our climate.
 - **Components of light pollution include:**
 - **Glare:** Excessive brightness that causes visual discomfort
 - **Skyglow:** Brightening of the night sky over inhabited areas
 - **Light trespass:** Light falling where it is not intended or needed
 - **Clutter:** Bright, confusing and excessive groupings of light sources.
 - **Causes:**
 - LP is a **side effect of industrial civilization.**
 - Its **sources** include building exterior and interior lighting, advertising, commercial properties, offices, factories, streetlights, and illuminated sporting venues.
 - **Effects:**
 - **Wastes Energy and Money:**

- Lighting that emits too much light or shines when and where it's not needed is wasteful. Wasting energy **has huge economic and environmental consequences.**
- **Disrupting the ecosystem and wildlife:**
 - Plants and animals depend on **Earth's daily cycle of light and dark rhythm to govern life-sustaining behaviors** such as reproduction, nourishment, sleep and protection from predators.
 - Scientific evidence suggests that **artificial light at night has negative and deadly effects** on many creatures including amphibians, birds, mammals, insects and plants.
 - **Ex:** A study has now shown how nocturnal dung beetles are forced to search for cues in their immediate surroundings when they can no longer navigate using natural light from the night sky.
- **Harming human health:**
 - Like most life on Earth, humans adhere to a **Circadian Rhythm – our biological clock** – a sleep-wake pattern governed by the day-night cycle. Artificial light at night can disrupt that cycle.
- **Solutions:**
 - The simple solution is to **reduce animals' experience of direct and indirect light pollution:** turning off unnecessary lights at night.
 - Where lights cannot be turned off, they **can be shielded** so that they do not shed light into the surrounding environment and sky.
 - The International Dark-Skies Association has certified more than 130 '**International Dark Sky Places**', where artificial lighting has been adjusted to reduce skyglow and light trespass. However, nearly all are in developed countries in the northern hemisphere.
 - Less-developed regions are often both species-rich and, currently, less light-polluted, presenting **an opportunity to invest in lighting solutions** before animals there are seriously affected.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) measures the growth in core sector industries.
2. The IIP is compiled by the National Statistical Office.
3. Renewable energy sector is one of the industries in the core sector.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- In the calculation of the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**, the data of the following 8 sectors is measured. **Eight core sectors comprise 40.27%** of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is **compiled and published monthly** by the **National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The **eight-core sector industries** that are measured under IIP, in decreasing order of their weightage:
 - **Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.**
 - **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

2. Consider the following statements regarding Pangolins:

1. Pangolins are anteaters found in the Himalayan and north-eastern region of India.
2. All the seven species of Pangolins are found in India.
3. Indian Pangolin is listed as endangered in the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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

Answer : B

Explanation

- The **pangolin**, also called scaly **anteater**, is an elongated, armour-plated insectivore mammal.
 - Seven species of pangolin are found across the world, of which, **two are found in India**, namely **Indian pangolin** (*Manis crassicaudata*) and **Chinese pangolin** (*Manis pentadactyla*). **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The Indian Pangolin is found throughout the country **south of the Himalayas**, excluding the **north-eastern region** while the Chinese Pangolin ranges through **Assam and the eastern Himalayas**. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - The Chinese pangolin is distinguished from other Asian pangolins by its almost helmeted appearance, smaller scales than the Indian pangolin.
- As per **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, the pangolin is part of the “red list”.
 - While the **Indian pangolin is listed as “endangered”** and the Chinese pangolin has been listed as “critically endangered”. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
 - All pangolin species are listed in Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix I.
 - In India, pangolins, both Indian and Chinese, are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

3. Which of the following parties were established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar?

1. The Peasants and Workers Party of India
2. All India Scheduled Castes Federation
3. The Independent Labour Party

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- All India Scheduled Castes Federation and The Independent Labour Party were established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

4. Which of the following statement(s) is/ are correct with respect to I-MESA Scheme

1. It aims to conduct Social Audits for all the schemes of the Department starting FY 2021-22.
2. It is formulated by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : c

I-MESA Scheme

- Social audit is an audit of a scheme jointly by the Government and the people, especially by those who are affected by the scheme or its beneficiaries.
- Information-Monitoring, Evaluation and Social Audit (I-MESA) in FY 2021-22 is launched by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The social audits will be done through Social Audit Units (SAU) of the States and National Institute for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.

5. Consider the following statements with respect to Controller General of Accounts (CGA)

1. The Office of Controller General of Accounts derives mandate from Article 150 of the Indian Constitution.
2. It works under the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.

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

Controller General of Accounts (CGA)

- Deepak Das recently took charge as the new Controller General of Accounts.
- He is the 25th officer to hold the position of Controller General of Accounts (CGA).
- The office of Controller General of Accounts (CGA) works under the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.
- It is the Principal Accounting Adviser to Government of India and is responsible for establishing and maintaining a technically sound Management Accounting System.
- The Office of CGA prepares monthly and annual analysis of expenditure, revenues, borrowings and various fiscal indicators for the Union Government.

6. Amargarh Fort, sometimes seen in the news recently, is located in?

- a. Jaipur, Rajasthan
- b. Mysuru, Karnataka
- c. Hyderabad, Telangana
- d. Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

Answer : a

Amargarh Fort

- The fort, located in Jaipur, Rajasthan, is at the centre of a conflict between the tribal Meena community and local Hindu groups.
- Members of the Meena community say the Amargarh Fort was built by a Meena ruler predating Rajput rule in Jaipur, and this has been their holy site for centuries where they worship Amba Mata.

Meena Community

- They are also known as Meos or Mewati.
- The tribal members accused Hindu groups of trying to appropriate tribal symbols into the Hindutva fold, and of changing the name of Amba Mata to Ambika Bhawani.

Amargarh Fort

- The present form of the Amargarh Fort was given in the 18th century by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, founder of Jaipur.
- It has always been believed that there was some construction at the place before Jai Singh II built the fort.
- Prior to Rajput rule by the Kachhwaha dynasty, Jaipur and its nearby regions were ruled by Meenas, who had political control.
- It is believed that the fort was built by a Meena Sardar from the Nadla gotra, now known as Badgoti Meenas.
- Sardars from the Meena community ruled large parts of Rajasthan till around 1100 AD.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. A technology should be evaluated both on the basis of its utility and the intention of its creator. Critically examine. (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce briefly about the growing utility of technologies.
- Discuss some ethical contradictions and concerns arising out of increasing role of technologies.
- Discuss how these technologies should be evaluated on the basis of the intention of its creator.
- Give conclusion.

2Q. Genome India Project provides an opportunity for India to make great progress in the fields of biotechnology, agriculture and healthcare. Discuss. (250 words)

Approach

- Briefly explain Genome India Project
- Highlight the project's applicability in biotechnology, agriculture and healthcare sector, and how such will present opportunity for India towards progress/contribution.
- Highlight some challenges to the project.
- In conclusion, give some measures to overcome these challenges.