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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Judicial Hierarchy

In News : India has integrated Judiciary compared to Federal Judicial system in USA. There is also the presence of hierarchy in Indian Judicial System.

Issues in Judiciary

- The Constitution contemplates a **hierarchy of jurisdictions**, but no judge, acting within her jurisdiction, is “inferior” or “subordinate”.
- As constitutional beings, **judges are limited in jurisdiction** but also supreme within their own jurisdiction.
- However, **Article 235** speaks of “control over subordinate courts”. This Article adds insult to injury by describing these entities and agents as persons “**holding a post inferior to the post of a district judge**”.
- While the Constitution allows “supervision”, it does not sanction **judicial despotism**.
- Arbitrary practices in writing confidential reports of district justices seem to continue that perpetuates the inferior status associated with such “subordinate” judges.

Model Judgement to be replicated across India

- The August 11 order of the Himachal Pradesh High Court resolves that “hereinafter, all the courts in the state other than the high court shall be referred to as **district judiciary**”.
- Furthermore, “these courts shall not be referred to as subordinate court” **but as trial courts**.
- The colonial idea of “subordination” stands replaced by the constitutional idea of **independence of the judiciary**.

Conclusion:

Senior-most district judges and judges of the high courts constituting the collegiate system to facilitate judicial administration, infrastructure, access, monitoring of disposal rates, minimisation of undue delays in administration of justice, alongside matters concerning transfers, and leave.

2. Filled to the nines

In News :

President of India has signed the recommendation for the appointment of nine new judges to the Supreme Court.

- The Centre has approved all names recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium led by Chief Justice of India NV Ramana for appointment as apex court judges.

Details:

- The President of India has signed warrants of appointment within days of the Collegium recommending eight High Court judges, including three women, and a lawyer for elevation.
- This is the first time nine names have been cleared at one go for judge's assignments at the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court's working strength has now risen to 33.
- The sanctioned strength is 34 judges including the Chief Justice of India.
- Judicial vacancies and delays in appointments have been a major cause of delays in justice delivery.
- It is nearly two years since Supreme Court appointments were made.

Importance:

- The latest round of appointments possibly signifies the onset of an era in which the two branches (executive and judiciary) agree more and agree faster on the Collegium's recommendations.
- The presence of three women and the fact that different High Courts are getting representation are positive features and augur well for increasing diversity on the Bench.
- India might, in the near future see its first woman Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- The trend of appointing members of the Bar directly to the Supreme Court continues with the honour going this time to former Additional Solicitor-General, P.S. Narasimha.

Conclusion:

The opaque collegium system is sustained only by the belief that it is a protection against executive intervention. This most important purpose of its existence should not be lost sight of. Going forward, there must be lesser impasse in judicial

appointments, quicker processing of names, and greater consideration to social and regional representation.

3. Near and present

In News :

Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) has claimed responsibility for the horrific explosions at Kabul's Hamid Karzai Airport.

Concerns:

- The attack has proven the Taliban's new regime is unable or unwilling to curb the terror threat stemming from the country.
- There are also suspicions of some collusion within the Taliban regime.
 - The Haqqani group that is securing Kabul and the airport periphery, (a UN-designated terror entity) has carried out attacks with the IS-K in the past.
- This suicide bombing has shattered the remaining optimism the world had that the West pulling out forces and handing the country over to the Taliban, as part of negotiations in Doha, would result in a more peaceful Afghanistan.

Impact on India:

- The U.S. maintains that it continues to coordinate with the Taliban on security.
 - This further sets the seal on any idea of investigations or operations against the Taliban.
- The situation will further pose challenges to India's already hostile borders in consonance with threats from Pakistan at the LoC and support to cross-border terrorism, as well as China's LAC aggressions.
- This is an alarming scenario, the Government must now acknowledge and prepare for the threats to India.

Way Forward:

- New Delhi must focus on diplomacy to highlight its concerns. The beginning must be with the UN where India will have a unique role.
 - As a UNSC member and President, India must ensure that the UN's most powerful body does not appear helpless in the face of the Taliban's challenge.

- India must assert the need for the Taliban regime to recognise human rights, adopt some form of representation for its people, and distance itself from terror groups, should it want recognition.
- India must ensure that the Haqqani group, including its chief Sirajuddin Haqqani who is the Deputy to Taliban chief Haibatullah Akhundzada, is not included in the official power structure.
 - The group has been responsible for terror and suicide attacks on Indian consulates and the Embassy in particular in 2008-09.
- As Chairman of the 1988 Sanctions Committee that lists 135 Taliban members as designated terrorists, India must stand firm on any move to ease sanctions on them, including travel, funds access and weaponry.
- The UN General Assembly (UNGA)'s accreditation committee must also decide on whether to allow a future Taliban-led government to occupy Afghanistan's seat.
- It is important that India's position on the Afghan situation and its impact on Indian security are articulated strongly.
- While the External Affairs Minister said the Government is pursuing a "wait and watch" policy, it must be taken into consideration that India does not enjoy the luxury of distance from the ticking time bomb in India's neighbourhood.
- Developments in Afghanistan will have a significant impact on India too.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Deepor Beel breathes easy after zone notification

In news Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified the eco-sensitive zone of Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary

Deepor Beel

- Deepor Beel is located to the south-west of Guwahati city, in Kamrup district of Assam, India.
- It is a permanent freshwater lake, in a former channel of the Brahmaputra River, to the south of the main river.
- It is a wetland under the Ramsar Convention which has been listed since November 2002.

- Considered as one of the largest beels in the Brahmaputra valley of Lower Assam, it is categorised as a representative of the wetland type under the **Burma monsoon forest biogeographic region**.
- It is also an **important bird sanctuary** inhabiting many migrant species.

What are the concerns?

- A garbage dump and encroachment for human habitation and commercial units.
- A railway track which is set to be doubled and electrified, on its southern rim.
- Deepar Beel's water has become toxic and lost many of its aquatic plants that elephants would feed on.
- Traditionally viewed as a wasteland or breeding ground of disease, wetlands actually provide fresh water and food and serve as nature's shock absorber.
- Wetlands, critical for biodiversity, are disappearing rapidly, with recent estimates showing that 64% or more of the world's wetlands have vanished since 1900.
- Major changes in land use for agriculture and grazing, water diversion for dams and canals and infrastructure development are considered to be some of the main causes of loss and degradation of wetlands.

5. Asset monetisation – execution is the key

In News:

The government has announced an ambitious programme of asset monetisation. It hopes to earn 6 trillion in revenues over a four-year period.

About Asset monetisation

- Unlike in privatisation, **no sale of government assets is involved**.
- The government parts with its assets – such as roads, coal mines – for a specified period of time in exchange for a lump sum payment.
- Asset monetisation will happen mainly in three sectors: roads, railways and power.
- Other assets to be monetised include: airports, ports, telecom, stadiums and power transmission.
- Two important statements have been made about the asset monetisation programme.

- The focus will be on **under-utilised assets**.
- Monetisation will happen through **public-private partnerships (PPP) and Investment Trusts**.

Challenges

1) Investors would prefer property utilised assets over underutilised assets

- Suppose an asset is not being used adequately because it has not been properly developed or marketed well enough.
- A private party may judge that it can put the assets to better use.
- It will pay the government a price equal to the present value of cash flows at the current level of utilisation.
- This is a win-win situation for the government and the private player.
- The government gets a 'fair' value for its assets.
- The private player gets its return on investment.
- **Increase in efficiency:** The economy benefits from an **increase in efficiency**.
- Monetising under-utilised assets thus has much to commend it.
- However, in case of an asset that is being properly utilised, the private player has **little incentive to invest and improve efficiency**.
- It simply needs to operate the assets as they are.
- The private player may value the cash flows assuming a **normal rate of growth**.
- The **cost of capital** for a private player is higher than for a public authority.
- **The higher cost of capital for the private player** could offset the benefit of any reduction in operating costs.
- The government earns badly needed revenues but these could be less than what it might earn if it continued to operate the assets itself.
- There is no improvement in efficiency.
- The benefits to the economy are likely to be greater where under-utilised assets are monetised.
- However, private players will prefer well-utilised assets to assets that are under-utilised.
- That is because, in the former, cash flows and returns are more certain.

2) Valuation challenges

- It is very difficult to get the valuation right over a long-term horizon, say, 30 years.
- For a road or highway, growth in traffic would also depend on factors other than the growth of the economy.
- . If the rate of growth of traffic turns out to be higher than assessed by the government in valuing the asset, the private operator will reap windfall gains.

- Alternatively, if the winning bidder pays what turns out to be a steep price for the asset, **it will raise the toll price steeply.**
- The consumer ends up bearing the cost.
- It could be argued that a **competitive auction process** will address these issues and fetch the government the right price while yielding efficiency gains.
- But that assumes, among other things, that there will be a large number of bidders for the many assets that will be monetised.

3) Life of the returned asset may not be long

- There is no incentive for the private player **to invest in the asset towards the end of the tenure of monetisation.**
- The life of the asset, when it is returned to the government, may not be long.
- In that event, **asset monetisation virtually amounts to sale.**
- Monetisation through the PPP route is thus fraught with problems.

Way forward: InvIT route

- Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT) are **mutual fund-like vehicles** in which investors can subscribe to units that give dividends.
- Monetisable assets will be transferred to InvITs.
- The sponsor of the Trust is required to hold a minimum prescribed proportion of the total units issued.
- InvITs offer a portfolio of assets, **so investors get the benefit of diversification.**
- In the InvIT route to monetisation, **the public authority continues to own the rights to a significant portion of the cash flows** and to operate the assets.
- So, the issues that arise with transfer of assets to a private party – such as incorrect valuation or an increase in price to the consumer – are less of a problem.

Key takeaways

- **Low cost of capital for public authority:** In general, due to the low cost of capital for public authority, the economy is best served when public authorities develop infrastructure and monetise these.
- **InvIT route:** Monetisation through InvITs is likely to prove less of a problem than the PPP route.
- **Monetise under utilised assets:** We are better off monetising under-utilised assets than assets that are well utilised.
- **Monitoring authority should be set up:** To ensure proper execution, there is a case for independent monitoring of the process.

- The government may set up an Asset Monetisation Monitoring Authority staffed by competent professionals.

Conclusion

Government must pay attention to the challenges in asset monetisation and use it in the proper way to increase the efficiency in the economy.

6. Indian astrophysicists spot rare merger of three jumbo black holes

Black hole

- A black hole is an object in space that is **so dense and has such strong gravity that no matter or light can escape its pull**. Because no light can escape, it is **black and invisible**.

Event Horizon

- There's a **boundary at the edge of a black hole** called the **event horizon**, which is the **point of no return** – any light or matter that crosses that boundary is sucked into the black hole.
- It would need to **travel faster than the speed of light to escape**, which is impossible.

Singularity

- Anything that crosses the event horizon is destined to fall to the very **centre of the black hole** and be **squished into a single point** with infinite density, called the singularity.

Detecting a black hole

1. By **looking for the effects of their extreme gravity**, which pulls stars and gases toward them.
2. Also, while anything past **the event horizon is invisible**, outside that boundary there is sometimes a spiral disk of gas that the black hole has pulled toward – but not yet into – itself.
3. **The gases in that accretion disk are heated up as they accelerate toward the black hole**, causing them to glow extremely brightly. The colours they glow are invisible to us, but are detectable with an X-ray telescope.

4. Scientists have also detected the gravitational waves generated when two black holes collide. Light surrounding the black hole right to the edge of the event horizon, which is the goal of the Event Horizon Telescope.

How big are black holes?

- Small black holes are called **stellar-mass black holes**. They have masses similar to those of larger stars – about five to 20 times the mass of the sun.
- The other kind is **supermassive black holes**, which are millions to billions of times more massive than the sun. That's the kind the **Event Horizon Telescope has been trying to photograph**, as bigger objects ought to be easier to see. There is some evidence that black holes between these two sizes exist, but that has yet to be confirmed.
- While black holes are very massive, that doesn't mean they take up a lot of space. Because they're so dense, they're actually quite small. According to NASA, a black hole 20 times the mass of the sun could fit inside a ball 16 kilometres wide – the width of the Island of Montreal at its widest point.

Intermediate mass Black Holes

- Using data from the Hubble Space Telescope and two X-ray observatories, the researchers determined that this black hole is more than 50,000 times the mass of our sun and located 740 million light years from Earth in a dwarf galaxy, one containing far fewer stars than our Milky Way.
- Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects possessing gravitational pulls so powerful that not even light can escape.
- This is one of the few “intermediate-mass” (PT SHOT) black holes ever identified, being far smaller than the supermassive black holes that reside at the center of large galaxies but far larger than so-called stellar-mass black holes formed by the collapse of massive individual stars. An object that was discovered originally back in 2010 is indeed an intermediate-mass black hole that ripped apart and swallowed a passing star
- The star was probably roughly a third the mass of the sun. Scientists have searched for intermediate-mass black holes for four decades and fewer than 10 good examples are known, though large numbers may exist.
- “So finding a new one is very significant. Also, a black hole swallowing a star happens on average only once every 10,000 years or so in any particular galaxy so these are rare occurrences,”
- The supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way is 4 million times the mass of the sun and located 26,000 light years from Earth. The closest stellar-mass black star is about 6,000 light years from Earth. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

- Scientists called intermediate-mass black holes the “missing link” in understanding the range of black holes.

Where are black holes found?

- Supermassive black holes are found at the centre of most galaxies, including our own Milky Way. The one in our galaxy is called
- **Sagittarius A*** and is one of those the Event Horizon Telescope has been attempting to photograph.
- **Sagittarius A* isn't the only black hole in our galaxy**, though.
- Earlier this year, astronomers discovered another 12 within three light-years of it, suggesting there could be upwards of 10,000 black holes around the galactic centre.

Where do black holes come from?

- **Supermassive black holes are believed to form at the same time as the galaxy that surrounds them, but astronomers aren't sure exactly how.**
- **Stellar mass black holes** form when a star with a mass greater than three times that of our sun runs out of fuel. It explodes into a supernova and collapses into an extremely dense core that we know as a black hole – something predicted by Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity.
- **Einstein's theory also predicts the size and shape of the black holes** that the Event Horizon Telescope is trying to photograph.

7. Punjab govt. to give incentives to industries for using stubble

Context:

In an effort to check **stubble** burning menace during the paddy season, Punjab Government has announced a slew of measures.

Highlights:

1. Certain categories of industries have been permitted to install paddy-straw-fired boilers to claim fiscal incentives.
2. Cumulative fiscal incentives of ₹25 crore have been provided to the first 50 existing industries on 'first come first serve' basis for using paddy straw as fuel in boilers.

3. Non-fiscal incentives to industries are in terms of availability of 'Panchayat' land for storage of paddy straw with lease agreement upto 33 years.
4. Balers would be made available on priority in areas where paddy straw is used as fuel in boilers.

Significance:

The move would help in tackling the menace of stubble burning during harvesting of Kharif crops, thus also conserving the fertility of soil and saving the beneficial micro-organisms.

What is stubble burning?

It is a common practice followed by farmers to prepare fields for sowing of wheat in November as there is little time left between the harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat.

Impact: Stubble burning results in emission of harmful gases such carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide along with particulate matter.

Why farmers opt for stubble burning?

1. They do not have alternatives for utilising them effectively.
2. The farmers are ill-equipped to deal with waste because they cannot afford the new technology that is available to handle the waste material.
3. With less income due to crop damage, farmers are likely to be inclined to light up their fields to cut costs and not spend on scientific ways of stubble management.

Advantages of stubble burning:

- It quickly clears the field and is the cheapest alternative.
- Kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide.
- Kills slugs and other pests.
- Can reduce nitrogen tie-up.

Effects of Stubble Burning:

- **Pollution:** Open stubble burning emits large amounts of toxic pollutants in the atmosphere which contain harmful gases like methane (CH₄), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Volatile organic compound (VOC) and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. They may eventually cause smog.
- **Soil Fertility:** Burning husk on ground destroys the nutrients in the soil, making it less fertile.
- **Heat Penetration:** Heat generated by stubble burning penetrates into the soil, leading to the loss of moisture and useful microbes.

Alternative solutions that can avoid Stubble Burning:

1. Promote paddy straw-based power plants. It will also create employment opportunities.
2. Incorporation of crop residues in the soil can improve soil moisture and help activate the growth of soil microorganisms for better plant growth.
3. Convert the removed residues into enriched organic manure through composting.
4. New opportunities for industrial use such as extraction of yeast protein can be explored through scientific research.

What needs to be done- Supreme Court's observations?

1. Incentives could be provided to those who are not burning the stubble and disincentives for those who continue the practice.
2. The existing **Minimum Support Price (MSP) Scheme** must be so interpreted as to enable the States concerned to wholly or partly deny the benefit of MSP to those who continue to burn the crop residue.

Chhattisgarh Model:

An innovative experiment has been undertaken by the Chhattisgarh government by setting up **gauthans**.

- A gauthan is a dedicated five-acre plot, held in common by each village, where all the unused stubble is collected through parali daan (people's

donations) and is converted into organic fertiliser by mixing with cow dung and few natural enzymes.

- The scheme also generates employment among rural youth.
- The government supports the transportation of parali from the farm to the nearest gauthan.
- The state has successfully developed 2,000 gauthans.

8. Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme

In News :

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced **the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2021-22 Series VI**, which will be open for subscription for the period August 30-September 3, 2021.

Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

- **The sovereign gold bond** was introduced by the Government in 2015.
- Government introduced these bonds to help reduce India's over dependence on gold imports.
- The move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

Key facts:

Eligibility: The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities, including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.

Denomination and tenor: The bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. The tenor will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from the 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates.

Minimum and Maximum limit: The minimum permissible investment limit will be 1 gram of gold, while the maximum limit will be 4 kg for individual, 4 kg for Hindu Undivided Family and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April-March) notified by the government from time to time.

Joint Holder: In case of joint holding, the investment limit of 4 kg will be applied to the first applicant only.

Collateral: Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

In news: Recently, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has launched Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) immunisation drive for infants.

- Earlier in December 2020, India's first fully indigenously developed pneumococcal conjugate vaccine "Pneumosil" was launched.

About the vaccine

- It prevents pneumococcal disease. It can protect both children and adults from pneumococcal disease.
- The vaccine is a mix of **several bacteria of the pneumococci family**, which are known to cause pneumonia – hence 'conjugate' is included in the name of the vaccine.
- Conjugate vaccines are made using a **combination of two different components**.

What is Pneumococcal disease?

- Pneumococcal disease is a name for any infection caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae* or pneumococcus.
- Most people carry pneumococcus in their nose and throat, where the bacteria do not cause any symptoms. However, sometimes the bacteria grow and spread to other parts of the body and that's when people become sick.
- Besides pneumonia, pneumococcal bacteria can also cause:
 - Ear infections.
 - Sinus infections.

- Meningitis (infection of the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord).
- Bacteremia (infection of the blood).

What is Universal Immunization Programme?

- It was launched in 1985 to prevent mortality and morbidity in children and pregnant women against 12 vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Under UIP, free of cost vaccination is provided against twelve vaccine-preventable diseases i.e. Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis B, Pneumonia and Meningitis due to Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib), Measles, Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Rotavirus diarrhoea.
- The programme is one of the largest health programmes in the world. Despite being operational for many years, UIP has been able to fully immunize only 65% of children under 1 year of age.

2. States to regulate gambling websites: Centre

The Delhi High Court was informed by the Centre that **online gambling was a State subject** and the State governments have to make laws to regulate such activities.

Allegations under petition:

- A petition filed seeking directions to the authorities **to take appropriate steps to ban or prohibit online gambling websites** from operating in the country.
- The plea claimed that **despite there being laws enacted** by various States prohibiting such activities, a **large number of websites providing gambling, betting and wagering games** are still accessible in India.
- All these activities are being carried out because of a **lack of enforcement of the laws in question**.
- The petition claimed that the online gambling system in India is unregulated and it is a great place for **carrying out hawala operations, laundering money**, etc.
- Foreign Exchange laws, as well as Income Tax laws, are also likely being violated by the online gambling websites.

Centre's stand:

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) **does not possess the judicial wisdom** to determine whether an online game is involved in gambling or not.

- Any such action expected to be taken **will result in a conflict of powers** vis-a-vis with the 'appropriate government' which is the State government.

Legal Measures:

- Betting and gambling **can be found in Part II of the State list**.
- They have been **mentioned in detail in the Seventh Schedule** of the Indian Constitution. Means that the **state government can exercise full control** over betting and gambling practices in their state.
- They can also **formulate their state-specific laws**.
- A good example of this is the choice given to most states for the **adoption of the Public Gambling Act, 1976**.

Categories of Game:

- India mainly puts the games into **two broad categories** to differentiate them. The two categories are that game is either a **Game of Chance or a Game of Skill**.
- **Game of chance:**
 - Game of chance are all those games that are played randomly.
 - These games are based on luck.
 - A person can play these games without prior knowledge or understanding.
 - For instance, dice games, picking a number, etc. Such games are considered illegal in India.
- **Game of skill:**
 - Game of skill are all those games that are played based on a person's prior knowledge or experience of the game.
 - A person will require skills such as analytical decision-making, logical thinking, capability, etc.
 - Some games might also require some initial training to win.
 - Such games are considered legal by most of the Indian states.

Legal position of gambling in India right now:

- **Horse racing and lotteries** are **legal** in India. Horse racing involves some prior skills so it isn't all about gambling
- Several Indian states have **legalized lotteries**. These are Goa, Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Punjab, Nagaland, West Bengal, and Sikkim
- Online gambling and land-based casinos are legalized in Goa, Sikkim, Nagaland, and Daman under the Public Gambling Act, 1976
- **Maharashtra has prohibited gambling** and considers gambling as illegal under the Bombay Prevention of Gambling Act, 1887

- E-gaming (games of chance) has been legalized in Sikkim and Nagaland
- Telangana and Arunachal Pradesh consider the game of skill as illegal as per the Telangana State Gaming Act, 1974
- All India Gaming Federation, The Rummy Federation, and Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports have adopted a self-regulation code for all their advertisements.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. Report by ADB on businesses in Asia and the Pacific 2021

Context:

A report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), titled Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2021 demonstrated that the region made substantial progress in the last two decades with respect to several development targets.

Highlights of the ADB report

Impact of the Pandemic

- The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed around 75-80 million people in the developing Asia-Pacific into extreme poverty in 2020.
- More than 5% (more than 200 million) of developing Asia's population lived in extreme poverty as of 2017, and this 5% would have declined to an estimated 2.6% in 2020 if the pandemic had not occurred.
- A significant number of households engaged in business were severely affected by the pandemic. Among households engaged in agriculture or relying on wages and salary, more than half reported an increase in income, no change or a decrease of less than 26%.
- As unemployment rates increased by at least 20% in 2020 due to the pandemic across the globe, the Asia-Pacific region lost an estimated 8% of working hours. As businesses were disrupted, many workers lost their jobs, leading to higher unemployment and underemployment rates.

Other Highlights

- Asia and the Pacific's economy has grown at a robust pace in recent years and contributed as much as 35% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in current US dollars in 2019. However, Covid-19 has arrested this growth.
- From 2019 to 2020, labour force participation rates among women, on average, declined by 1.4%, while labour force participation rates among men declined by 0.8%.
- 71% of Asia-Pacific's workforce is now in non-agricultural employment. From 2000-2019, the region's non-agricultural employment rate grew to 71% from 52%, one of the fastest growth rates worldwide.

About Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank established on 19 December 1966 to promote social and economic development in Asia.
- It is headquartered in the city of Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines.
- The ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank and an official United Nations Observer.
- Japan holds the largest proportion of shares in ADB followed by the USA, and it has a weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions (just like the World Bank).
- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East or ECAFE) and non-regional developed countries.
- ADB defines itself as a social development organization that is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.
- ADB aids in reducing poverty through investments in the form of loans, grants and information sharing (in infrastructure, health care services, financial and public administration systems), helping nations prepare for the impact of climate change or better manage their natural resources, as well as other areas.
- ADB is an official United Nations Observer.
- **India was a founding member of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1966 and is now the bank's fourth largest shareholder and top borrower.**

4. Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis report: UNICEF

Context:

Recently, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with Fridays for Future launched a report named 'The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index'.

'The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index'

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) released a report called 'The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index' which is the first comprehensive analysis of climate risk from a child's perspective.

Highlights of the Children's Climate Risk Index report

- The Children's Climate Risk Index ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as Cyclones and Heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services.
- Pakistan (14th), Bangladesh (15th), Afghanistan (25th) and India (26th) are among four South Asian countries where children are at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis.
- Young people living in the Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau are the most at risk of the impacts of climate change. These children face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate and environmental shocks with a high vulnerability due to inadequate essential services, such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education.
- Nearly every child around the world is at risk from at least one of the climate and environmental hazards which are Coastal Flooding, Riverine Flooding, Cyclones, Vector Borne Diseases, Lead Pollution, Heatwaves and Water Scarcity. An estimated 850 million children – 1 in 3 worldwide – live in areas where at least four of these climate and environmental shocks overlap.
- There is a disconnect between where GreenHouse gas (GHG) Emissions are generated, and where children are enduring the most significant climate-driven impacts.
- Climate change is deeply inequitable. While no child is responsible for rising global temperatures, they will pay the highest costs.
- Compared to adults, children require more food and water per unit of their body weight, are less able to survive extreme weather events, and are more susceptible to toxic chemicals, temperature changes and diseases, among other factors.

- The majority of the carbon emission reduction pledges for 2030 that 184 countries made under the Paris Agreement aren't nearly enough to keep global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius.
- Some countries won't achieve their pledges, and some of the world's largest carbon emitters will continue to increase their emissions.

Indian Scenario

- India is among four South Asian countries where children are most at risk of the impacts of climate change threatening their health, education, and protection.
- It is estimated that more than 600 million Indians will face 'acute water shortages' in the coming years, while at the same time Flash Flooding is to increase significantly in the majority of India's urban areas once the global temperature increase rises above 2 Celsius.
- Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the most polluted air in 2020 were in India.

Way Forwards/Recommendations in the UNICEF report

- Increase investment in climate adaptation and resilience in key services for children.
- Countries must cut their emissions by at least 45% (compared to 2010 levels) by 2030 to keep warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Provide children with climate education and greens skills, critical for their adaptation to and preparation for the effects of climate change.
- Include young people in all national, regional and international climate negotiations and decisions, including at COP (Conference of the Parties- A climate Convention) 26 (It will be held in Glasgow, UK in November 2021).
- Ensure the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is green, low-carbon and inclusive, so that the capacity of future generations to address and respond to the climate crisis is not compromised.

5. Tokenization by RBI

In news Recently, the Reserve Bank of India has decided to extend the scope of tokenisation to include consumer devices such as laptops, desktops, wearables like wristwatches and bands, as well as Internet of Things (IoT) devices.

What is RBI Tokenization?

- Tokenization refers to the replacement of actual card details with a unique alternate code called the 'token', which is unique for a combination of card, token requestor (i.e. the entity which accepts request from the customer for tokenization of a card and passes it on to the card network to issue a corresponding token) and identified device.
- Normally, in a tokenized card transaction, parties / stakeholders involved are merchant, the merchant's acquirer, card payment network, token requestor, issuer and customer.
- However, an entity, other than those indicated, may also participate in the transaction.

About tokenization-

- It aims at improving the safety and security of the payment system.
- The Reserve Bank had earlier permitted 'tokenization' services, under which a unique alternate code is generated for transaction purposes, on mobile phones and tablets of cardholders.
- RBI had issued guidelines on "Tokenization - Card transactions" in 2019, permitting authorised card networks to offer card tokenization services to any token requestor, subject to conditions.
- Prior to the latest circular, the facility was available **only for mobile phones and tablets of interested cardholders**.
- A tokenized card transaction is considered safer as the actual card details are not shared with the merchant during transaction processing.

Safety and Security of card details-

- Actual card data, token and other relevant details are stored in a secure mode by the authorised card networks.
- Token requestor cannot store Primary Account Number (PAN), i.e., card number, or any other card detail.
- Card networks are also mandated to get the token requestor certified for safety and security that conform to international best practices / globally accepted standards.

6. QSim Toolkit

In news: Quantum Computer Simulator (QSim) Toolkit was launched by the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY).

About

- QSim is a first-of-its-kind indigenously developed toolkit that helps in learning and understanding the practical aspects of programming using Quantum Computers.
- QSim provides a platform to acquire the skills of '**programming**' (Quantum Code) as well as '**designing**' real Quantum Hardware.
- It enables the researchers and students to carryout research in Quantum computing in a cost effective manner.
- **Developed** collaboratively by IISc Bangalore, IIT Roorkee and C-DAC with the support of MeitY under the 'Design and Development of Quantum Computer Toolkit (Simulator, Workbench) & Capacity Building' project.
- **Features** - QSim offers a QC Simulator integrated with a Graphic User Interface (GUI) based Workbench allowing people to create Quantum programs.
- QSim helps simulate Quantum circuits with and without noise and test how well various algorithms work with imperfect quantum components.
- It has pre-loaded Quantum programs and algorithms providing a head start to the users.
- **QSim - Offering Model**
 - PARAM SHAVAK QSim - Standalone system with Quantum Simulator in a box
 - PARAM QSim Cloud - Available on cloud using HPC infrastructure PARAM SIDDHI AI (developed under NSM program).

7. Floods at Valmiki Tiger Reserve

Wildlife in **Valmiki Tiger Reserve** (VTR) is threatened by floodwaters descending from **Nepal** that has entered the low-lying areas of the reserve.

Major Highlights:

- Wild habitats and manmade **infrastructures** were damaged by flood water.
- Animals would either flee in search of elevated land or flood water would push them into **residential localities**.
- Wildlife **like rhinos** from the Nepal side reached VTR due to the flood waters.
- Teams of forest guards have been patrolling the area and swimmers with boats monitoring the wildlife.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve:

- **Valmiki National Park** is a Tiger Reserve in **West Champaran District of Bihar, India**.

- It is the only National Park in Bihar.
- Valmiki Tiger Reserve covers 898.45 km² which is 17.4% of the total geographical area of the district.

Landscape

- The landscape encompasses foothills ranges of **Himalayan Shivaliks** with cliffs, ridges, gorges, hills, streams, and valleys.

Fauna:

- Bengal tiger, Indian rhinoceros, Asiatic black bear, Indian sloth bear, Indian leopard, wild dog, wild water buffalo, and wild boar.
- Reptiles: pythons, King cobras, Krait, Banded kraits and domuha snakes.
- At present 241 bird species have been reported from VTR.

Flora:

There are seven forest types found in VTR: -

- Bhabar – Dun Sal Forest
- Dry Siwalik Sal Forest
- West Gangetic Moist Mixed Deciduous Forest
- Khair – Sissoo Forest
- Cane Brakes
- Eastern Wet Alluvial Grassland
- Barringtonia Swamp Forest

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following countries will be participating in the multinational peacekeeping exercise - “Shared Destiny-2021”?

1. China
2. Pakistan
3. India
4. USA
5. Thailand

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : a

Shared Destiny - 2021

- It is a multinational peacekeeping exercise.
- The militaries of China, Pakistan, Mongolia and Thailand will take part in this exercise to be organised by the People's Liberation Army in the central Henan province from September 6 to 15, 2021.
- The scenario of the exercise is joint operations of multinational peacekeeping forces and the exercise will be held in a close-to-real battlefield environment set in accordance with the international, professional and realistic combat standards.

2. What was/were the object/objects of Queen Victoria’s Proclamation (1858)?

1. To disclaim any intention to annex Indian States.
2. To place the Indian administration under the British Crown.
3. To regulate East India Company’s trade with India.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- On November 1, 1858, Lord Canning announced Queen Victoria's proclamation to "the Princes, Chiefs and Peoples of India," which unveiled the future policy of the British Rule in India.
- It announced that the queen had assumed the government of India and henceforth the Indian administration would be under the British crown.
 - In the wake of the Indian rebellion of 1857, the British government effectively abolished the East India Company in 1858.
- It announced perpetual support for "native princes" and promised no further intention to annex Indian States. It also claimed non-intervention in matters of religious belief or worship within British India.

3. SUJALAM Campaign, sometimes seen in the news recently, aims to?

- a. Achieve more Open defecation free (ODF)-Plus villages
- b. Impart clean habits and good sanitation behaviour to school children
- c. Achieve 100% internet connectivity in Indian villages through local cable networks
- d. Engaging NGOs to spread awareness about empowerment schemes for the marginalised people

Answer : a

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti began 'SUJALAM', a '100 days campaign' as part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations to create more and more ODF Plus villages by undertaking waste water management at village level particularly through creation of 1 million Soak-pits and also other Grey water management activities.
- The Campaign has started from today i.e. 25th August, 2021 and will continue to run for the next 100 days.

The key activities that will be organised in the villages under this campaign include:

1. Organizing Community consultations, Khuli Baithaks and Gram Sabha meetings to analyze the current situation
 2. Pass resolution to maintain ODF sustainability and achieve needed number of soak pits to manage the grey water
 3. Develop a 100 days' plan to undertake sustainability and soak pit construction related activities
 4. Construct requisite number of soak pits
 5. Retrofit toilets where needed through IEC and community mobilization and
 6. Ensure all newly emerging Households in the village have access to toilets.
- The disposal of waste water and clogging of waterbodies in the villages or on the outskirts of the villages remain one of the major problems.
 - The Campaign would help in management of the wastewater and in turn would help to revive the waterbodies.
 - Furthermore, the campaign would boost the momentum of SBMG phase II activities through community participation and it will increase awareness about ODF-plus activities.

4. Consider the following statements regarding SAMRIDH Programme:

1. It has been launched by the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY).
2. It aims at creating a conducive platform to Indian hardware product start-ups.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : A

Explanation

- Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)** has launched the 'Start-up Accelerators of MeitY for pRодукt Innovation, Development and growth (SAMRIDH)' programme. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

- The programme aims to create a conducive platform to Indian **Software Product start-ups** to enhance their products and secure investments for scaling their business. Hence, **statement 2 is not correct.**
- Being implemented by **MeitY Start-up Hub (MSH)**.
 - MSH acts as a national coordination, facilitation and monitoring centre that will integrate all the incubation centres, start-ups and innovation related activities of MeitY.
- Also, aims to further the Indian start-up growth which has seen the emergence of 63 unicorns and is now the third largest unicorn hub globally with a total valuation of USD 168 billion.

5. With reference to Sambhar Lake, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is India's largest inland salt lake in Rajasthan.
2. It is surrounded by the Aravali hills on all sides.
3. Sambhar has been designated as a Ramsar site.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The world-famous Sambhar Salt Lake is located in the state of Rajasthan about 80 km southwest of Jaipur.
- The Sambhar Lake is the country's largest inland saline water body.
- It is surrounded by the Aravali hills on all sides.
- Sambhar Lake is a wetland of 'international importance' under the Ramsar Convention.
- The lake is known for being a habitat for a large number of migratory species during the winter season. It includes species like flamingoes, pelicans and waterfowls among others.

6. With reference to the 'Children's Climate Risk Index', consider the following statements:

1. It is launched by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with Fridays for Future.
2. India is among four South Asian countries where children are most at risk of the impacts of climate change.

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

- Recently, the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** in collaboration with **Fridays for Future** launched a report named '**The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index**'. Hence, **statement 1 is correct.**
 - It is the first comprehensive analysis of climate risk from a child's perspective.
 - Earlier an analysis, based on Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index, had shown the impact of Climate Change on children across the world.
- Children's Climate Risk Index ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as Cyclones and Heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services.
 - Pakistan (14th), Bangladesh (15th), Afghanistan (25th) and **India (26th)** are among four South Asian countries where children are at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis.
 - **India is among four South Asian countries where children are most at risk of the impacts of climate change** threatening their health, education, and protection. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain intra-generational and inter-generational issues of equity from the perspective of inclusive growth and sustainable development. (150 words)

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly mentioning the meaning of intra-generational and inter-generational equity.
- Separately explain what the intra-generational and inter-generational issues of equity are.
- Conclude your answer by mentioning the significance of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

2. In India it is said that the wealth hierarchy mimics the caste hierarchy. In the light of this statement establish the relationship between caste and economic inequality in India and highlight the initiatives taken to address the caste inequality.

Approach

- Introduce by explaining the given statement with relevant facts and data.
- Discuss the relationship between caste and economic inequality in India.
- Highlight the policy measures and other initiatives designed to address caste inequality.