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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Honour of the National Flag

Ahead of Independence Day, the Centre has urged all citizens not to use a national flag made up of plastic and asked states and Union Territories to ensure strict compliance with the flag code.

Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act

- The law, enacted on December 23, 1971, penalizes the desecration of or insult to Indian national symbols, such as the National Flag, the Constitution, the National Anthem, and the Indian map, as well as contempt of the Constitution of India.
- Section 2 of the Act deals with insults to the Indian National Flag and the Constitution of India.

Other provisions

- Section 3.22 of The Flag Code of India, 2002 deals with laws, practices and conventions that apply to the display of the national flag.
- Section 3.58 says: On occasions of State/Military/Central Paramilitary Forces funerals, the flag shall be draped over the bier or coffin with the saffron towards the head of the bier or coffin.
- The Flag shall not be lowered into the grave or burnt in the pyre.

Use of flag in funerals

- The flag can only be used during a funeral if it is accorded the status of a state funeral.
- Apart from police and armed forces, state funerals are held when people who are holding or have held the office of President, Vice-President, PM, Cabinet Minister, or state CM pass away.
- The status of a state funeral can be accorded in case of death of people not belonging to the armed forces, police or the above-mentioned categories by the state government.
- Then too, the national flag can be used.

Disposing of the national flag

- A/c to the Flag Code, such paper flags are not to be discarded or thrown on the ground after the event.
- Such flags are to be disposed of, in private, consistent with the dignity of the flag.

2. Custodial Violence is Biggest Threat to Human Rights: CJI

Why in News

Recently, the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** noted that **police stations pose the highest threat to human rights** and dignity as **custodial torture\violence** and police atrocities still prevail despite constitutional guarantees.

- He was speaking at the launch of a **legal service mobile application** and the **vision and mission statement** of **National Legal Services Authority's (NALSA)** legal services.

National Legal Services Authority

- It was **constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** which came into force in **November, 1995** to establish a nationwide uniform network for providing free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society.
- **CJI is the Patron-in-Chief** and the second senior most Judge of the **Supreme Court** of India is the Executive Chairman of the Authority.
- **Article 39 A** of the Constitution provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society, to promote justice on the basis of equal opportunity.
 - **Article 14 and Article 22 (1)**, obligates the State to ensure equality before law.
- It can be noted that the role played by NALSA and its networks is very much relevant to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goal-16**, which seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Key Points

- **Vision & Mission Statement:**
 - It encapsulates the vision of NALSA **to promote an inclusive legal system and to ensure fair and meaningful justice** to the marginalized and disadvantaged sector.
 - It further promotes the mission of NALSA to **legally empower the marginalized and excluded groups** of the society by providing effective legal representation, legal literacy & awareness to bridge the gap between the legally available benefits and the entitled beneficiaries.
- **Legal Services Mobile Application:**
 - It incorporates features including **seeking legal assistance, legal advice, and other grievances**.
 - Application tracking facilities, and seeking clarifications are some additional features **available to both Legal Aid beneficiaries and Legal Services Authorities**.
 - Beneficiaries can also apply for pre-institution mediation through the app. Victims can also file an application for Victim Compensation with the App.

Custodial Violence

- **Related Data:**
 - According to **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** data, between 2001 and 2018, only 26 policemen were convicted of custodial violence despite **1,727 such deaths being recorded in India**.
 - Only 4.3% of the 70 deaths in 2018 were attributed to injuries during custody due to physical assault by police.
 - Except in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, no policeman was convicted for such deaths across the country.
 - Apart from custodial deaths, **more than 2,000 human rights violation cases were also recorded against the police between 2000 and 2018**. And only 344 policemen were convicted in those cases.
- **Major Reasons:**
 - **Lack of Legal Representation:**
 - Lack of effective legal representation at police stations is a huge detriment to arrested or detained persons. The first hours of arrest or detention often decide the fate of the case for the accused.
 - **Lengthy Judicial Processes:**
 - Lengthy, expensive formal processes followed by courts dissuade the poor and the vulnerable.
 - **Absence of Strong Legislation:**

- India **does not have an anti-torture legislation** and is yet to criminalise custodial violence, while action against culpable officials remains illusory.
- **Institutional Challenges:**
 - The entire **prison system is inherently opaque** giving less room to transparency.
 - India also **fails in bringing the much desired Prison Reforms** and prisons continue to be affected by poor conditions, overcrowding, acute manpower shortages and minimal safety against harm in prisons.
- **Excessive Force:**
 - The **use of excessive force including torture to target marginalised communities** and control people participating in movements or propagating ideologies which the state perceives as opposed to its stature.
- **Not Adhering to International Standard:**
 - Although India has signed the **United Nations Convention against Torture in 1997** its ratification still remains.
 - While Signing only indicates the country's intention to meet the obligations set out in the treaty, Ratification, on the other hand, entails bringing in laws and mechanisms to fulfil the commitments.
- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions:**
 - **Protection from torture is a fundamental right** enshrined under **Article 21 (Right to Life)** of the Indian constitution.
 - The **right to counsel** is also a fundamental right under **Article 22(1)** of the India constitution.
 - Section 41 of **Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)** was amended in 2009 to include safeguards under 41A, 41B, 41C and 41D, so that arrests and detentions for interrogation have reasonable grounds and documented procedures, arrests are made transparent to family, friends and public, and there is protection through legal representation.

Way Forward

- To keep police excesses in check, **dissemination of information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services is necessary.**
 - The **installation of display boards and outdoor hoardings** in every police station/prison is a step in this direction.
- If India wants to remain as a society governed by the rule of law, **it is imperative for the judiciary to bridge the gap of accessibility to justice** between the highly privileged and the most vulnerable.

- Accessing justice in India is not merely an aspirational goal. **Judiciary needs to work hand in hand with various wings of the government** to make it a practical reality.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

3. What is Absorption Spectroscopy?

Researchers from IIT Madras and IISER Kolkata have developed a method to detect minute quantities of chemicals in solution using Absorption Spectroscopy.

Absorption Spectroscopy

- Absorption spectroscopy is a tool to detect the presence of elements in a medium.
- Light is shone on the sample, and after it passes through the sample is examined using a spectroscope.
- Dark lines are seen in the observed spectrum of the light passed through the substance, which correspond to the wavelengths of light absorbed by the intervening substance and are characteristic of the elements present in it.
- In usual methods, about a cubic centimeter of the sample is needed to do this experiment.
- In the method developed here, minute amounts of dissolved substances can be detected easily.
- Usually in absorption spectroscopy, the principle used is that light because of its wavelike nature, shows diffraction patterns, that is, dark and light fringes, when it scatters off any object.

Studying small objects

- A related concept called the Abbe criterion sets a natural limit on the size of the object being studied.
- According to this criterion, the size of the observed object has to be at least of the order of the wavelength of the light being shone on it.
- If one wants to perform absorption spectroscopy using visible light, namely, blue, green and red, the wavelengths [of these colours] are about 400 nm, 500 nm and 600 nm, respectively.

What has Indian researchers achieved?

- In the method used by the researchers here, tiny, nano-sized particles that can absorb light being shone on them and re-emit red, blue and green light were employed.
- The particles emit electric fields that are analogous to how a tiny magnet would give off magnetic lines of force – this is called a dipole, and the particle is like a tiny mobile phone’s antenna.
- This dipole generates an electromagnetic field depending upon the quantum properties of the erbium dopants in the glass.
- The absorption leaves a gap in the reflected light, which is what is observed and used to analyse the nature of the absorbing material.

Applications of this technology

- There are many potential applications.
- Small molecules almost ten-millionth of an mm in diameter can be detected while these pass the emission region of the glass particle.
- The future is to use it to measure individual molecules, see absorption spectroscopy of a single DNA or protein molecule.

4. Revisit the idea of ‘aging out’ India’s coal plants

Context

As part of the Union Budget address for 2020-21, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, said that the shutting down of old coal power plants, which are major contributors to emissions, will aid the achievement of India’s Nationally Determined Contributions.

Advantages of shutting down old coal power plants

- The availability of under-utilised newer and presumably more efficient coal-based capacity means that shutting down older inefficient plants would **lead to improved efficiencies, reduced coal usage, and hence, cost savings.**
- It would be uneconomical for old plants to install **pollution control equipment** required to meet the emission standards announced by the Environment Ministry, and hence it would be better to retire them.

Why the decision needs finer scrutiny?

- **Some old plants are cost-effective:** There are also several old plants, which **generate at lower costs**, such as plants at Rihand, Singrauli, and Vidhyanchal (Madhya Pradesh).
- **Locational advantage:** This may be due to locational advantage rather than efficiency, as older plants are likely to be located closer to the coal source, reducing coal transport costs.
- **Not cost-effective:** Savings in generation cost from shutting down plants older than 25 years would be less than ₹5,000 crore annually, which is just 2% of the total power generation cost.
- **Not effective in reducing coal consumption:** Savings in coal consumption by replacing generation from plants older than 25 years with newer coal plants are also likely to be **only in the 1%-2% range**.
- **Economical even after installing pollution control equipments:** There are some old plants that may continue to be economically viable even if they install pollution control equipment as their **current fixed costs are very low**.

Important roles played by old thermal power plants

- **Significant part of power supply:** Plants older than 25 years make up around **20% of the total installed thermal capacity** in the country and play a significant role in the country's power supply.
- **Supporting renewable:** To support the growing intermittent renewable generation in the sector, there is an increasing need for capacity that can provide **flexibility, balancing, and ancillary services**.
- Old thermal capacity, **with lower fixed costs**, is a prime candidate to play this role until other technologies (such as storage) can replace them at scale.
- **Political economy risk:** There is also a political economy risk, as aggressive early retirement of coal-based capacity, without detailed analyses, could result in **real or perceived electricity shortage in some States**, leading to calls for investments in coal-based base-load capacity by State-owned entities.

Way forward

- **Nuanced analysis needed:** Instead of using the age as the only criteria a more disaggregated and nuanced analysis needs to be used.
- **Constraint related to renewable and increasing demand:** We also need to take into account aspects such as **intermittency of renewables**, growing demand, and need to meet emission norms, to make retirement-related decisions.

Conclusion

It may be prudent to let old capacity fade away in due course, while focusing on such detailed analysis and weeding out the needless capacity in the pipeline, to derive long-term economic and environmental benefits.

5. The sovereign right to tax is not absolute

Context:

- The recently introduced **Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill** in the Lok Sabha aiming to nullify the provision for retrospective tax has brought to light the topic of bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and the sovereign right to tax.

Background:

- The retroactive tax amendment of 2012 resulted in Vodafone and Cairn Energy suing India before **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) tribunals** of India-Netherlands and **India-UK. bilateral investment treaties (BITs)**.
 - Notably, India in its 2016 Model BIT carved out taxation measures completely from the scope of the investment treaty.
- Both the tribunals ruled against India's retroactive amendment of tax laws.

Details:

Sovereign right to tax:

- Several ISDS tribunals have held that the **tax policy of a country is a matter relating to the sovereign power of the state**, and thus the State has a sovereign right to enact the tax measures it deems appropriate at any particular time.

Limits on the right to tax:

- However, it should be noted that the state's sovereign **right to impose taxes are not absolute and there are limits to it**.
- Two provisions of relevance in this regard are **expropriation and the fair and equitable treatment provision**.
 - The tax should not be discriminatory or arbitrary and it should not be confiscatory.

- Fair and equitable treatment envisions a certain degree of **legal certainty** in taxation measures. Also, any legal changes such as amending the tax laws should be done in a **reasonable and proportionate manner**.

Conclusion:

- The biggest takeaway from the Cairns and Vodafone fiasco is that India should exercise its right to regulate while being mindful of its international law obligations, acting in good faith and in a proportionate manner.
- India's **right to tax in the public interest should be balanced with the investor's interest of legal certainty**.

6. Monsoon blues

Context:

- The recent monsoons in Delhi have resulted in water logging in several parts of the city.
 - Despite many measures to address the age-old **problem of urban flooding in Delhi**, waterlogging during the rainy season continues to torment the city.

Core problems:

Problem with storm water network:

- At the centre of the urban flooding problem is the **state of both natural and engineered storm water drains**. Storm water drains are supposed to carry the runoff rainwater and empty it into a water body, which in Delhi is the river Yamuna.
 - Natural storm water drains are developed over the years as water naturally tries to find a way to flow and it depends on the terrain and slope of the land. **The natural storm water drains have been impacted by rapid urbanization in the region**. The **encroachment** on these natural storm water drains is also another major concern.
 - The **engineered storm water drains have been developed in silos** and the much-needed connectivity with larger drains has been missing.
- Apart from the problems with the storm water network leading to urban flooding, faulty sewage systems, rapid urbanisation, and climate change are intensifying Delhi's urban flooding problem.

Faulty sewage systems:

- The **lack of a separate sewage network, which is not connected to the storm water drain** is a major concern. Sewage flows into the storm water network at many points.
- The **waste and sewage reduce the water-carrying capacity of these storm water drains**.

Rapid urbanization:

- From being around 60 lakh, the population of the city has increased about four times in a short period of time.
- The **unregulated development of the city** has altered its natural drainage pattern.
- The **concretization** has greatly reduced the water absorption capacity and this adds to the volume and speed of run-off water.

Climate change:

- The rainfall has become erratic. Global warming has resulted in more intense spells of rainfall in a short duration.
 - There have been instances where a month's rainfall has been witnessed in a span of 3-4 hours in a day.

Administrative failure:

- The **lack of timely maintenance of drains and sewers** has contributed to the clogging of storm water drains. The fact that drains in the city are controlled by multiple agencies, makes the task of maintenance of drains and sewers more difficult.
- **The Drainage Master Plan**, commissioned almost nine years ago and largely seen as a solution, is yet to be implemented due to severe data irregularity.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Addressing the quality deficit in India's technical education

Context

This year, AICTE approved the closure of 63 engineering colleges across the country.

Deterioration of quality

- **Tweaking with curriculum:** Private entrepreneurs took the lead to meet the growing demand of the country in technical education in the mid-Eighties, but with little idea of the subject.
- Subjects like materials, applied physics and thermodynamics which forms the building blocks of engineering became dispensable.
- Because they were both tough to teach for the teachers and tough to pass for the students.
- **Expansion:** This softening of subjects coupled with unfettered expansion in the early and mid-2000s, resulted in **real dilution of the overall standards in the country.**
- Lack of adequate number of teachers, lack of quality in those available, inability of the management to make adequate investments in a dynamic environment, lack of employment opportunities, shelf life of skills coming down with every technology-related intervention and a constant experimentation with curriculum have all been the bane of quality in technical education.

Issues

- Engineering education suffers from regulatory gaps, poor infrastructure, lack of qualified faculty and the **non-existent industry linkage** that contributed to the **abysmal employability of graduates** from most of these institutes.
- **No linkage with Industry:** Not a single industry body, be it CII, FICCI or ASSOCHAM has managed to effectively inform the education planners on the growth in different employment sectors.

- **No independent body to suggest AICTEC:** The government also has not taken any tangible steps to set up an independent body to advise AICTE on this vital aspect.
- **Excessive changes:** A constant fiddling with the curriculum, reducing total credits, giving multiple choices in the name of flexibility, dispensing with mathematics and physics at the qualification level, teaching in local languages may all be good arguments, but one must assess their utility and their effect on technical education in the long run.

Way forward

- **Proactive:** Rather than being reactive, institutions must proactively define the practicing elements of education.
- **Investment in teaching:** The corrective measures for these shortfalls are technology intensive, are experiential, and need investments in teaching.
- **Quality assurance body:** The ultimate measure of performance is embedded in quality assurance.
- The need of the hour is to create a truly **autonomous quality assurance body** at an arms-length from the government, manned by eminent persons both from the industry as well as academia.

Conclusion

The education paradigm is staring at a large shift and technical education cannot remain immune to that change.

2.PM-DAKSH Scheme

Why in News

Recently, **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has launched '**PM-DAKSH**' (**Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi**) **Portal** and '**PM-DAKSH**' **Mobile App** to make the skill development schemes accessible to the target groups - Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Safai Karamcharis.

Key Points

- **About**
 - PM-DAKSH Yojana is **being implemented from the year 2020-21.**
 - Under this, **eligible target groups are provided with the skill development training programmes** on Short Term Training Program;

Up-Skilling/Reskilling; Entrepreneurship Development Programme, and Long Term Training Programme.

- These **training programmes are being implemented through** the government training institutes, sector skill councils that have been constituted by **the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**, and other credible institutions.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Marginalized persons of **SC (Scheduled Caste), OBC (Other Backward Classes), Economically Backward Classes, Denotified tribes, Sanitation workers** including waste pickers, manual scavengers, transgenders and other similar categories.
- **Implementation:**
 - It is implemented by the three Corporations under the Ministry:
 - National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC),
 - National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC),
 - National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC).
- **Status of Skill Development Training of Target Groups:**
 - Skill development training has been imparted to 2,73,152 people of the target groups in the last 5 years.
 - A target, **during the year 2021-22**, has been set to provide the skill development training **to approx 50,000 people of the target groups through these three corporations.**
- **Significance of the Scheme:**
 - Most of the persons of the target groups have minimal economic assets; therefore, provision of training and enhancing their competencies is essential for economic empowerment/ upliftment of these marginalized target groups.
 - Many of the persons of the target groups belong to the category of rural artisans who have become marginalized owing to the coming of better technologies in the market.
 - Women due to their overall domestic compulsions, cannot be involved in wage employment which normally involves long working hours and sometimes migration to other cities, there is a need to empower the women amongst the target groups.

Initiatives Related to Skill Development

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0:** It was launched by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in 2021 in a bid to

empower India's youth with employable skills by making over 300 skill courses available to them.

- **National Career Service Project:** Launched in 2015 to offer free online career skills training to job-seekers registered with it. It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Labour & Employment**.
- **Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood (SANKALP):** Its focus is on district-level skilling ecosystem through convergence and coordination. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme which is collaborated with the World Bank.
- **Kaushalacharya Awards:** Launched to recognize the contribution made by skill trainers and to motivate more trainers to join the Skill India Mission.
- **Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS):** The scheme is to provide industry apprenticeship opportunities to the general graduates exiting in April 2019 through the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS). It was **launched by the Ministry of Education**.
- **Atmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM):** Launched by MSDE in 2020, it is a portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

3. National Commission for Women

The Central Government has nominated Smt. Rekha Sharma, as Chairperson of the National Commission for Women for another term of three years.

National Commission for Women

- The NCW is the statutory body generally concerned with advising the government on all policy matters affecting women.
- It was established on 31 January 1992 under the provisions of the Indian Constitution as defined in the 1990 National Commission for Women Act.
- The first head of the commission was Jayanti Patnaik.

Constitutional provision

- The Indian Constitution doesn't contain any provision specifically made to favor women intrinsically.
- Article 15 (3), Article 14 and Article 21 protect and safeguard women. They are more gender-neutral.

Objectives

- The objective of the NCW is to represent the rights of women in India and to provide a voice for their issues and concerns.
- The subjects of their campaigns have included dowry, politics, religion, equal representation for women in jobs, and the exploitation of women for labor.
- They have also discussed police abuses against women.

Composition of National Commission for Women

The Commission shall consist of:

- A Chairperson, committed to the cause of women, to be nominated by the Central Government.
- five Members to be nominated by the Central Government from amongst persons of ability, integrity and standing who have had experience in law or legislation, trade unionism, management of an industry potential of women, women's voluntary organizations (including women activist), administration, economic development, health, education or social welfare;
- Provided that at least one Member each shall be from amongst persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively;

Powers of NCW

- Provide consultation on all major policy matters that affect women.
- Issuing summons for the examination of documents and the witnesses.
- It has the power to make any public record.
- Receiving evidence on affidavits
- Discovery and production of documents
- Summoning and enforcement

Functions of the NCW

- **Presentation of reports:** Table reports should be submitted to the Central Government every year. When the commission feels it's appropriate. The reports upon the functioning and working of the safeguards.
- **Investigation and Examination:** There should be proper investigation and examination made under the Constitution and other laws. This is related to the protection of the rights of women.
- **Review of laws:** Constantly all laws are reviewed and scrutinized. And necessary amendments and alterations are made to meet the needs of the current world.
- **Cases of Violation:** Ensure there is no violation against women and taking due care of such cases.

- **Suo Motu Notice:** It takes care of complaints and also suo motu matters about the deprivation of rights of women. Implementation of laws favoring the welfare of women.
- **Evaluation:** Assessing the development and the progress of the women community under the Center and State level.
- **Special studies and investigation:** To understand the limitations in the system and curb it with strategic plans and mechanisms.

Powers of the NCW

- **Not concrete powers:** The NCW is only recommendatory and has no power to enforce its decisions. Often it takes action only if the issues are brought to light.
- **Legal powers:** Commission lacks constitutional status, and thus has no legal powers to summon police officers or witnesses.
- **Less funding:** NCW's functions are dependent on the grants offered by the central government. Financial assistance provided to the Commission is very less to cater to its needs.
- **Political interference:** It does not have the power to choose its own members.

4. Who was Major Dhyan Chand?

The PM has announced that the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award will now be named after Major Dhyan Chand.

Who was Dhyan Chand?

- Quite simply, he was the first superstar of hockey, considered a wizard or magician of the game.
- He was the chief protagonist as India won three consecutive Olympic hockey gold medals – Amsterdam 1928, Los Angeles 1932, and Berlin 1936.
- He is said to have wowed the watching public with his sublime skills, intricate dribbling and gluttonous scoring ability.
- During those tournaments, there was no team that could compete with India – and most of the matches saw huge victory margins.
- India beat hosts the Netherlands 3-0 in the 1928 final, the US were thrashed by a scarcely-believable margin of 24-1 in the 1932 gold medal match, while Germany went down 8-1 in the 1936 decider.
- In all, Dhyan Chand played 12 Olympic matches, scoring 33 goals.

Legends associated with Dhyan Chand

- It is said that once his sublime skill and close control of the ball aroused such suspicion that his stick was broken to see whether there was a magnet inside.
- During the 1936 Berlin Games, Adolf Hitler offered him German citizenship and the post of Colonel in his country's Army, a proposition the Indian ace refused.

Why does the name evoke such emotion?

- Dhyan Chand played during India's pre-independence years, when the local population was subjugated and made to feel inferior by the ruling British.
- Hence, seeing an Indian dominating the Europeans in a sport invented by them evoked a lot of pride in them.
- There has been a long-running campaign arguing that Dhyan Chand be posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest honour.
- Before Independence and for some years after that, hockey was the only sport in which India consistently excelled at the international and Olympic stage.
- In fact, starting from Amsterdam 1928, India won seven of the eight hockey gold medals at the Games.
- Apart from K D Jadhav's wrestling bronze at Helsinki 1952, India had to wait until Atlanta 1996 and tennis player Leander Paes for an Olympic medal in a sport other than hockey.

Why is the renaming of the award significant?

- The eight gold medals in hockey have often been termed as the millstone around the necks of the subsequent generation of players.
- The modern game is an altogether different sport from the one played in Dhyan Chand's era.
- The Europeans and Australians have become much more proficient over the decades, while the change of surface has put a premium on fitness, speed, stamina, and physical strength.
- India had not managed to get into the top four at the Olympics since the boycott-affected Moscow Games in 1980.
- The later generations may have felt out of touch with the golden years, about which one could only read in books or listen to in tales of the protagonists and those who witnessed the heroics.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Faceless Assessment Scheme: Income Tax

Why in News

Recently, the Income Tax (I-T) Department notified three official email IDs to register grievances, under the **Faceless or e-Assessment Scheme**.

- The Prime Minister in August 2020 announced three key structural tax reforms under the '**Transparent Taxation - Honouring the Honest**' platform - faceless assessment, faceless appeal and taxpayers' charter to reduce tax disputes.

Key Points

- **Faceless or e-Assessment Scheme:**
 - **About:**
 - Under the faceless assessment system, a taxpayer or an assessee is not required to visit an I-T department office or meet a department official for income tax-related businesses.
 - **Launch:**
 - The faceless assessment scheme was **launched in 2019**.
 - **Objectives:**
 - To promote an efficient and effective tax administration, minimizing physical interface, increasing accountability and introduction of team-based assessments.
 - **Mechanism:**
 - Faceless assessment is administered through separate units within the tax department each of which has a specific and important role in the process, viz assessment units, verification units, technical units and review units. All these units work closely with the **National e-assessment Centre (NeAC)** and **Regional e-assessment Centre (ReAC)**.
 - **Advantage:**
 - The scheme brings greater flexibility for taxpayers and professionals representing before tax authorities. It has resulted in substantial time savings on account of travel to the tax office, waiting time over there, etc.
- **Related Recent Initiatives:**
 - **Dispute Resolution Committee:**

- In **Budget 2021**, the Minister of Finance has proposed the formation of a Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) in order to provide quicker relief to taxpayers in tax disputes.
- The DRC will cater to small taxpayers having a taxable income of up to Rs. 50 lakh and a disputed income of up to Rs. 10 lakh.
- **Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme:**
 - The scheme provides for settlement of disputed tax, disputed interest, disputed penalty or disputed fees in relation to an assessment or reassessment order on payment of 100% of the disputed tax and 25% of the disputed penalty or interest or fee.

6. CHAPEA Mission by NASA

NASA is seeking applications for its new mission called the Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog (CHAPEA), which is related to Mars.

CHAPEA

- The mission is set to begin in 2022 and will give four successful applicants the chance to live and work in a 1,700 square-foot module that is created by a 3D printer and is called the Mars Dune Alpha.
- The simulated quarters include a kitchen, areas for medical, recreation, fitness, work, crop growth, a technical work area and two bathrooms.
- This habitat will simulate what it feels like to carry out missions on Mars including resource limitations, equipment failure, communication delays and any other environmental stressors.
- The crew will be expected to perform simulated spacewalks, scientific research and use virtual reality and robotic controls and exchange communications.

What is the purpose of this mission?

- The habitat in which the crew members will stay will be as Mars-realistic as possible.
- The results from this analog mission will provide scientific data that will help in validating the systems that will be used for actual missions to Mars and also help in solving problems for spaceflight research.
- CHAPEA is not the only analog mission, there are others including Aquarius/NEEMO, Concordia, Desert RATS and HESTIA.
- Analog missions are required because not all experiments can be carried out in space because resources and money are limited.

7. IPCC's Climate Assessment Report

The Geneva-based Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will release the first part of its Sixth Assessment Report, the periodic status check that has now become the most widely accepted scientific view of the state of the Earth's climate.

What is IPCC?

- The IPCC, an intergovernmental body was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- It was later endorsed by the UN General Assembly. Membership is open to all members of the WMO and UN.
- The IPCC produces reports that contribute to the work of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the main international treaty on climate change.
- The objective of the UNFCCC is to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system.”
- The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report was a critical scientific input into the UNFCCC's Paris Agreement in 2015.

What are IPCC reports?

- IPCC reports cover the scientific, technical and socioeconomic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation.
- The IPCC does not carry out original research, nor does it monitor climate or related phenomena itself.
- Rather, it assesses published literature, including peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources.
- However, the IPCC can be said to stimulate research in climate science.

The Assessment Reports

- The five previous assessment reports that have come out since the IPCC was established in 1988 have formed the basis of international climate change negotiations, and the actions of the governments.
- Their value has been globally acknowledged, and the fourth assessment report, which came out in 2007, won the IPCC the Nobel Peace Prize.

- Each of these voluminous reports, the last couple of them running into thousands of pages, have built upon the previous ones with updated knowledge and understanding of the climate system.
- The reports have presented projections for temperature rise till 2100 under different scenarios and the kind of impacts that can be expected under each of these pathways.

Key projections of the 6th Report

Apart from incorporating the latest available scientific evidence, the Sixth Assessment Report is also attempting to provide more actionable information to help governments take policy decisions.

- **REGIONAL FOCUS:** It is expected that this report would likely state what the scenarios for sea-level rise in the Bay of Bengal region is, not just what the average sea-level rise across the world is likely to be.
- **EXTREME EVENTS:** There is expected to be bigger focus on extreme weather events, like the ones we have seen in the last few weeks.
- **CITIES:** Densely populated mega-cities are supposed to be among the most vulnerable to impacts of climate change. The report is expected to present specific scenarios the climate change impacts on cities and large urban populations, and also implications for key infrastructure.
- **SYNERGIES:** IPCC is expected to present a more integrated understanding of the situation, cross-link evidence and discuss trade-offs between different options or pathways, and also likely to cover social implications of climate change action by countries.

Why it matters?

- The IPCC assessment reports have been extremely influential in directing the dialogue and action on climate change.
- The First Assessment Report led to the setting up of the UNFCCC, the umbrella agreement under which international negotiations on climate change take place every year.
- The Second Assessment Report was the basis for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol that ran till last year, and the Fifth Assessment Report, which came out in 2014, guided the Paris Agreement.
- The global climate architecture is now governed by the Paris Agreement, which replaced the Kyoto Protocol from this year.
- There have been enough indications to suggest that global action was far below what was needed to keep the temperatures below 2°C, as mandated under the Paris Agreement.

- In the immediate future, the IPCC report could serve as the most important warning towards the rapidly closing window of opportunity.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding Mars:

1. Its axial tilt and rotation period is similar to that of Earth.
2. It has two moons namely Olympus Mons and Phobos.
3. Chang'e-5 is China's interplanetary mission to Mars.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : C

Explanation

- Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun and the second-smallest planet in the Solar System.
 - Mars is about half the size of Earth.
- Similarity to the Earth (Orbit and Rotation):
 - As Mars orbits the Sun, it completes **one rotation every 24.6 hours, which is very similar to one day on Earth (23.9 hours)**.
 - Mars' axis of rotation is tilted 25 degrees with respect to the plane of its orbit around the Sun. **This is similar to Earth, which has an axial tilt of 23.4 degrees. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - Mars has distinct seasons like Earth, but they last longer than seasons on Earth.
 - Martian days are called sols – short for 'solar day'.
- It has two small moons, **Phobos and Deimos. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - It has the largest volcano in the solar system i.e. Olympus Mons.
- Recently, **China's spacecraft Tianwen-1** landed on Mars carrying its first Mars rover named Zhurong. **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**

- China's Other Space Programmes:
 - Chang'e-5 (Moon)
 - Tianhe (Permanent Space Station)

2. In India, cluster bean (Guar) is traditionally used as a vegetable or animal feed, but recently the cultivation of this has assumed significance. Which one of the following statements is correct in this context?

- a. The oil extracted from seeds is used in the manufacture of biodegradable plastics
- b. The gum made from its seeds is used in the extraction of shale gas
- c. The leaf extract of this plant has the properties of anti-histamines
- d. It is a source of high quality biodiesel

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Guar gum is derived from guar seeds, a legume crop that grows in semi-arid regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana. Drilling companies use it to thicken water that is mixed with sand and pumped through shale rock cracks to extract gas.

3. Consider the following statements regarding Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors:

1. The list is notified by the Ministry of Commerce and Industries.
2. Social and Commercial Infrastructure is one of the categories included in the list.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

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

Answer :B

Explanation

- Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors is notified by the **Ministry of Finance. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- It includes following categories:
 - **Transport and Logistics:** Roads and bridges, Inland waterways, Airport, etc.
 - **Energy:** Electricity Generation, Electricity Transmission, etc.
 - **Water and Sanitation:** Solid Waste Management, Water treatment plants, etc.
 - **Communication:** Telecommunication, etc.
 - **Social and Commercial Infrastructure:** Education Institutions (capital stock), Sports Infrastructure, Hospitals (capital stock), Tourism infrastructure, etc. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Recently, the Finance Ministry has granted '**Infrastructure**' status for **exhibition and convention centres.**
 - It has been included in the List by insertion of a new item in the category of Social and Commercial Infrastructure.
- In 2020, the government added affordable rental housing projects to the list of sectors recognised as infrastructure.

4. Consider the following statements:

1. The State Government has the power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts.
2. The new district can only be created by passing a law in the State Assembly.

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

- The power to **create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State governments. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**

- This can **either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- Many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.
- The Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones. States are free to decide.
 - The Home Ministry comes into the picture when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station.
 - The State government's request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry seeking clearance.
 - A no-objection certificate may be issued after examining their replies.

5. State of Finance for Nature is released by which of the following organizations?

- a. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- b. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- c. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
- d. The Nature Conservancy

Answer : a

Explanation:

State of Finance for Nature

- The report was jointly produced by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Economic Forum and the Economics of Land Degradation.
- It analyzes the investment flow in nature-based solutions (NbS).
- It also identifies the future investment needed to meet the climate change, biodiversity and land degradation targets (set in three Rio Conventions).
- The NbS refers to sustainable management and use of nature to tackle socio-environmental challenges, which range from disaster risk reduction, climate change and biodiversity loss to food and water security as well as human health.
- NbS creates harmony between people and nature, enables ecological development and represents a holistic, people-centred response to climate change.

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Reverse Merger

1. It is a combination where a smaller company merges into a larger one.
2. In the case of small finance banks, the holding company is expected to be merged into the subsidiary bank, which is referred as downstream merger.

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

Reverse Merger

- A merger is a corporate action where two companies decide to bring together their assets and liabilities to create a single entity that is bigger and better than either of them.
- While a merger is usually proposed between equals, a reverse merger is a combination where a smaller company merges into a larger one, or a loss-making company merges into a profitable one.
- When NBFCs were originally allowed by the RBI to bag small finance bank licences to offer credit to unbanked segments of the population, the RBI required them to set up their banks under the non-operating financial holding company (NOFHCs) structure.
- This was so that the NBFC would separate its new banking operations from its other businesses.
- While reverse mergers usually create uncertainty for the merging companies, especially when loss-making entities are involved, small finance banks look set to benefit from this reverse merger.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Discuss the achievements and failures of Non-cooperation movement of 1920. How did it impact the subsequent freedom movements in pre-independence India. (250 words)

Approach

- Describe the Non-cooperation movement.
- State its achievements and failures.
- Give conclusion

2Q. The MSME sector acts as a factory for entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities as well as a tool for poverty eradication. In this context highlight the challenges and solutions for MSME sector? (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce by mentioning the importance of MSME sector in India.
- Mention the challenges faced by MSME sector and suggest their solutions.
- Conclude by giving the key policy areas which need concerted efforts for the revival of MSME sector.