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THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. An Indian sail to navigate the maritime environment

In news: PM Modi's address on August 9 at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation".

- He described the oceans as a common heritage for humankind and a lifeline for the future of the planet.

Need for Maritime Security

- With a long coastline and large island chains spread across the Indian Ocean, India has a natural seaward orientation, with key sea lanes of communication coursing through its surrounding seas.
- 90% of global trade is conducted on the high seas, for the simple reason that it continues to be the most cost effective mode of transport.
- Disruption of sea lanes of communication has National and global economic repercussions.
- Freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce are key to the spread of prosperity.
- India's natural interests stretch across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans as reflected in its inclusive Indo-Pacific vision.

During the debate, PM Modi outlined 5 principles needed for global maritime security. The principles are

1. Removing barriers from legitimate maritime trade,
2. Encouraging responsible maritime connectivity,
3. Settling maritime disputes through peaceful means and on the basis of international law,
4. Jointly facing natural disasters and maritime threats created by non-state actors.
5. Preserving the maritime environment and resources.

Primacy of UNCLOS

- As President of the UN Security Council for the month of August, India's leadership in the debate on maritime security, that too at the level of the

Prime Minister, has **strengthened its credentials as a key stake-holder in the maritime commons.**

- The Presidential Statement issued on the occasion highlights the commitment of the UN Security Council to international law.
- More relevantly, it emphasises the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as the legal framework governing all maritime activity.

Conclusion

India's natural interests stretch across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans as reflected in its inclusive Indo-Pacific vision. No doubt, India's initiative will further the prospects for a stable and enduring maritime environment.

2. AB-PMJAY and COVID treatment

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY), the Union government's health insurance scheme, approximately 20.32 lakh COVID-19 tests and 7.08 lakh treatments were authorised from April 2020 to July 2021.

- The cover allowed beneficiaries to avail free testing and treatment across all empanelled hospitals – both public and private.
- Besides this, State governments were provided with the flexibility of modifying the Ayushman packages as per the local requirements.

About Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)

- This scheme is a Centrally sponsored scheme with some Central sector components.
- PMJAY offers a sum insured of **5 lakh per family** for secondary care (which doesn't involve a super specialist) as well as tertiary care. For the beneficiaries, this is a free scheme.
- It is an **entitlement-based scheme** that targets the beneficiaries as identified by latest Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data.
- Individuals can walk into any empanelled hospital that can process cashless payments.
- Once identified by the database, the beneficiary is considered insured.
- The **insurance cost is shared by the centre and the state** mostly in the ratio of 60:40.

- There are about 1,400 packaged rates for various medical procedures under the scheme.
- These packaged rates also mention the number of average days of hospitalization for a medical procedure and supporting documents that are needed.
- Under **no circumstances can hospitals charge the beneficiary**. The scheme also has prescribed a daily limit for medical management.
- **National Health Agency** has been constituted as an autonomous entity under the Society Registration Act, 1860 for effective implementation of PMJAY in alliance with state governments.
 - This includes formulation of PMJAY policies, development of operational guidelines, implementation mechanisms, coordination with state governments, monitoring and oversight of PMJAY amongst other.

3. Afghan tragedy

The article talks about the current scenario in Afghanistan as the Taliban has taken over two-thirds of the country.

Taliban's advances:

- As the Taliban has captured Kandahar and Herat – Afghanistan's second and third largest cities, the war in Afghanistan appears to have entered an irreversible phase.
- The Afghan government has reportedly offered a power-sharing proposal to the Taliban.
- But Taliban's supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada said the Taliban are on the verge of establishing a "pure Islamic system" in Afghanistan, making it clear that they want the whole of Afghanistan under their command.
- Neither the offer nor the warning from the U.S. and other countries that they would not recognise a Taliban regime that takes power by force has stopped the militants.

What altered the balance of power?

- A major reason for the alteration of power on the battlefield was the withdrawal of the U.S.-led international forces.
- While the U.S.-Taliban agreement in February 2020 legitimised the Taliban, the American withdrawal gave them a sense of victory.
- At no point in talks with the Taliban did the U.S. manage to extract concessions towards a political settlement in Afghanistan.

- The American focus was on taking its troops out unharmed, and the Taliban stayed away from targeting Americans even when they continued an assassination campaign inside the country.
- The Afghanistan government is internally divided and lacking support in rural areas.
- When the national forces failed to defend the cities, the Afghan President turned to the ethnic leaders, but it is now too late as the Taliban are already at the gates of Kabul.
- The U.S. withdrawal has left the Afghan government devoid of its most critical advantage in the war – air support.

What's Next?

- The Taliban, like in the 1990s, has promised stability and security.
- But the tragedy is that if the Taliban takes over Kabul, Afghanistan's nearly 40 million population would once again be subjected to one of the most barbaric forms of religious totalitarianism.
- Whatever limited progress and freedoms the Afghans earned over the last 20 years are at risk of being surrendered to a murderous militia that has no regard for human rights.

4. Retreat of Glaciers in Ladakh

Why in News

According to a recent study by the **Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG)**, the **Pensilungpa Glacier** located in **Ladakh's Zaskar Valley** is retreating due to **increase in temperature and decrease in precipitation** during winters.

- This study assesses the **impact of climate change on glaciers**. Earlier, the **UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)** also assessed that the **Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) mountain ranges could lose up to two-third of its ice by 2100**.
- **WIHG** is an **autonomous body** under the **Department of Science and Technology** located in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

Key Points

- **Findings:**
 - **Rate of Decline:**
 - The glacier is now retreating at an average rate of **6.7 plus/minus 3 metre per annum**.
 - Glaciers may **retreat when their ice melts more quickly than snowfall can accumulate** and form new glacial ice.

- **Debris Cover:**
 - There is a **significant influence of debris cover** on the **mass balance and retreat of the glacier's endpoint**, especially in summer.
 - Furthermore, the mass balance data for the three years (2016–2019) showed a negative trend with a small accumulation area ratio.
 - **Mass balance** of the glacier is the **difference between the snow accumulated** in the winter and the **snow and ice melted** over the summer.
- **Impact of rise in the Air Temperature:**
 - **Due to continuous rise in the air temperature** in line with the global trend, the **melting would increase**, and it is possible that the **precipitation of summer periods at higher altitudes will change from snow to rain**, and that may influence the summer and winter pattern.
- **Impact:**
 - **Impact on Human Life:**
 - It will impact the **water, food, energy security and agriculture, including soil loss** due to soil erosion, **landslides and floods**.
 - Glacial lakes may also form due to the accumulation of melted ice, which may result in **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF)** and **even shifting global climate** by dumping freshwater into the oceans and so altering their circulation.
 - **Leaves Debris:**
 - Glacial retreat leaves boulders and masses of scraped-together rocky debris and soil called **glacial moraines**.
- **Initiative for Himalayan Ecosystem:**
 - **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem:** It is one of the **8 national missions** under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.

Glacier

- **About:**
 - It is a **large, perennial accumulation** of crystalline ice, snow, rock, sediment, and water that originates on land and moves down slope under the influence of its own weight and gravity. They are **sensitive indicators of changing climate**.
 - Out of total water on Earth, **2.1% is in glaciers** while 97.2% is in the oceans and inland seas.
- **Condition of glacier formation:**
 - Mean annual **temperatures are close to the freezing point**.

- **Winter precipitation** produces significant accumulations of snow.
- **Temperatures** throughout the rest of the year **do not result in the complete loss of the previous winter's snow accumulation.**
- **Glacial Landforms:**

Zaskar Valley

- It is a **semi-arid region** situated in the **northern flank of the Great Himalayas** at an altitude of more than 13 thousand feet.
- The Zaskar Range **separates Zaskar from Ladakh** and the average height of the Zaskar Range is about 6,000 m.
- This mountain range acts as a **climatic barrier protecting Ladakh and Zaskar** from most of the monsoon, resulting in a pleasantly warm and dry climate in the summer.
- **Marbal Pass, Zojila Pass** in the extreme northwest of Zaskar range are two notable passes in the region.
- Many rivers start in different branches of this range flow northward, and join the great Indus River. These rivers include **Hanle River, Khurna River, Zaskar River, Suru River (Indus), and Shingo River.**
- The Zaskar river then takes a north-eastern course until it joins the Indus in Ladakh.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Growth needs steps beyond reforms

Why 1991 stands out as a watershed year in the economic history of India

- This was the year in which the economy was faced with a severe **balance of payments crisis.**
- In response, we launched a wide-ranging economic programme to reform, restructure and modernise the economy.
- The break with the past came in **three important ways:**
- **Dismantling of licence and permit requirements:** The vast network of licences, controls and permits that dominated the economic system was dismantled.
- **Redefining the role of the state:** Changes were made by redesigning the role of the state and allowing the private sector a larger space to operate within,

- **Integration with world economy:** The inward-looking foreign trade policy was abandoned and the Indian economy was integrated with the world economy and trade.

Judging the performance of the economy after liberalisation

- It is appropriate to look at three broad parameters to judge the performance of the economy after liberalisation – **growth rate, current account deficit and poverty reduction.**

1) Growth rate after 1991

- Between 1992-93 and 2000-01, GDP at factor cost grew annually by 6.20%.
- Between 2001-02 and 2010-11, it grew by 7.69% and the growth rate between 2011-12 and 2019-20, was 6.51%.
- **Best growth rate:** The best performance was between 2005-06 and 2010-11 when showing clearly what the **potential growth rate** of India was.
- This is despite the fact that this period included the **global crisis year of 2008-09.**

2) Foreign reserves

- **BoP:** The **balance of payments** situation had remained comfortable.
- Most of the years showed a small deficit.
- The exceptions were 2011-12 and 2012-13 when the current account deficit exceeded 4%.
- This was taken care of quickly.
- **Forex reserves:** Foreign exchange reserves showed a substantial increase and **touched \$621 billion as of last week.**
- The opening up of the external sector, which included liberal trade policy, market-determined exchange rate and a liberal flow of external resources, has greatly strengthened the external sector.

3) Poverty ratio

- Going the Tendulkar expert group methodology, the overall poverty ratio came down from **45.3% in 1993-94 to 37.2% in 2004-05** and further down to 21.9% in 2011-12.
- The post-reform period up to 2011-12 did see a significant reduction in poverty ratio because of **faster growth supplemented by appropriate poverty reduction programmes** such as the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Extended Food Security Scheme.
- With the decline in growth rate since then and with negative growth in 2020-21, **this trend must have reversed**, i.e. the poverty rate may have increased.

Way forward

- Growth requires more than reforms. Reforms are, in the words of economists, only a necessary condition. It is not sufficient.
- **Need to increase investment:** It is the decline in investment rate of nearly five percentage points since 2010-11 that has led to the progressive decline of the growth rate.
- Reforms supplemented by a careful nurturing of the investment climate are needed to spur growth again.
- **Reform agenda must continue:** First of all, there is a need to move in the same direction in which we have been moving in the past three decades.
- Policymakers should identify the sectors which need reforms in terms of creating a competitive environment and improving the **performance efficiency**.
- From this angle, we need to take a relook at the financial system, power sector and governance. Centre and States must be joint partners in this effort.
- Second, in terms of government performance, there should be **increased focus on social sectors** such as health and education. ★

Conclusion

Growth and equity must go together. They must not be posed as opposing considerations. They are truly interdependent. It is only in an environment of high growth, equity can be pushed aggressively. ★

6. Vehicle Scrappage Policy, 2021

The launch of India's vehicle scrapping policy or the Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernization Programme (VVMP) seeks to usher in a new age of what it means to own and use an automobile in India.

Vehicle Scrappage Policy: Key Features

- **Fitness testing:** The government plans to set up between 450-500 automated vehicle fitness testing stations across India on a PPP basis. Private vehicles – which are over 20 years old – will have to undergo fitness tests, at an estimated cost of Rs 300-400 per test.
- **Scrappage:** A total of 60-70 vehicle scrapping centres will also be built, situated no further than 150-200 kilometres away from any location in India.
- **Green Tax:** Vehicles that pass the automated tests will be subjected to a 'green tax', which will see owners shell out an additional 10 per cent to 25 per cent of road tax at the time of the renewal of the vehicle's fitness certificate, along with re-registration fees.

- **Penalties:** Those who choose to drive a vehicle that has failed the automated test will face substantial penalties, and such vehicles could also be impounded.
- **Choice of owners:** The scrappage policy leaves the choice of scrapping to the owner of the vehicle, with Gadkari saying the automated tests will place emphasis on vehicle fitness, and not its age.

Implementation plan

- The implementation of the vehicle scrappage policy in India is still some time away.
- Initially, it will be heavy commercial vehicles that will need to undergo fitness tests starting 1 April, 2023.
- Fitness tests will be made mandatory for all other types of vehicles from 1 June, 2024, in a phased manner.

Why need such policy?

- **Clean mobility:** More than one crore vehicles on India's roads contribute greatly to rising pollution levels, as well as their tendency to be less fuel-efficient towards the end of their life.
- **Reducing oil import:** The promotion of clean mobility necessitates a reduction in the country's fuel import bills, and a reduction in emissions is a pressing need at this time.
- **Road safety:** Such vehicles are also inherently unsafe and can be a threat to their occupants as well as other road users.
- **Consumer benefits:** Scrapping an old vehicle and replacing it with a new one will bring substantial monetary benefits for motorists, in addition to reducing emissions and enhancing fuel efficiency.

Benefits for a vehicle owner

- Once the vehicle has been scrapped, the owner will receive anywhere between four to six percent of their old vehicle's ex-showroom price, and a scrappage certificate.
- This will make the individual eligible for a road tax rebate of 25 percent, a registration fee waiver and a discount of five percent of a new vehicle's ex-showroom cost, offered by the vehicle manufacturer.
- This will essentially make a new vehicle cheaper for someone who has scrapped their old vehicle, with potential discounts in the range of Rs 30,000 (for a car costing Rs 6 lakh) to Rs 50,000 (for a car costing Rs 10 lakh).

What are the other positives?

- **Investment and Employment:** The policy will attract investment of over Rs 10,000 crore, and generate 50,000 jobs in the country.
- **Recycling:** Proper recycling of raw materials obtained from the scrapping will help reduce the import of materials such as aluminium, copper, steel and more.
- **Vehicle price control:** With the potential to recycle up to 99 percent of materials used in a vehicle, raw material costs are estimated to drop by as much as 40 percent.
- **Transition to EVs:** There's also a possibility to derive materials needed for local production of lithium-ion batteries from scrapping older vehicles, which could help drive the growth of the EV business.
- **Circular Economy:** A circular economy depends on reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling of resources to create a closed-loop system, minimizing the use of resources, generation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.
- **Demand boost:** Globally, a scrappage policy has been followed by a boost in demand in the auto manufacturing sector, especially in Europe and the US.

7. Four new Wetlands added to Ramsar list

What are Wetlands?

- A wetland is a distinct ecosystem that is flooded by water, either permanently or seasonally, where oxygen-free processes prevail.
- The primary factor that distinguishes wetlands from other land forms or water bodies is the characteristic vegetation of aquatic plants, adapted to the unique hydric soil.

Significance of Wetlands

- Wetlands provide a wide range of important resources and ecosystem services such as food, water, fibre, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control and climate regulation.
- They are, in fact, are a major source of water and our main supply of freshwater comes from an array of wetlands which help soak rainfall and recharge groundwater.
- They provide many societal benefits: food and habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species; water quality improvement; flood storage; shoreline erosion control; economically beneficial natural products for human use; and opportunities for recreation, education, and research etc.

Which are the new sites added to the Ramsar List?

- Thol and Wadhvana from Gujarat and
- Sultanpur and Bhindawas from Haryana

With this, the number of Ramsar sites in India are 46 and the surface area covered by these sites is now 1,083,322 hectares.

(1) Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary

- Bhindawas WLS, the largest wetland in Haryana is a human-made freshwater wetland.
- Over 250 bird species use the sanctuary throughout the year as a resting and roosting site.
- The site supports more than ten globally threatened species including the endangered Egyptian Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Pallas's Fish Eagle, and Black-bellied Tern.

(2) Sultanpur National Park

- Sultanpur NP from Haryana supports more than 220 species of resident, winter migratory and local migratory waterbirds at critical stages of their life cycles.
- More than ten of these are globally threatened, including the critically endangered sociable lapwing, and the endangered Egyptian Vulture, Saker Falcon, Pallas's Fish Eagle and Black-bellied Tern.

(3) Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary

- Thol Lake WLS from Gujarat lies on the Central Asian Flyway and more than 320 bird species can be found here.
- The wetland supports more 30 threatened waterbird species, such as the critically endangered White-rumped Vulture and Sociable Lapwing , and the vulnerable Sarus Crane, Common Pochard and Lesser White-fronted Goose.

(4) Wadhvana Wetland

- Wadhvana Wetland from Gujarat is internationally important for its birdlife as it provides wintering ground to migratory waterbirds, including over 80 species that migrate on the Central Asian Flyway.
- They include some threatened or near-threatened species such as the endangered Pallas's fish-Eagle, the vulnerable Common Pochard, and the near-threatened Dalmatian Pelican, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and Ferruginous Duck.

8. Ballistic Missile Ghaznavi: Pakistan

Why in News

Recently, Pakistan has successfully test-fired a **nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile 'Ghaznavi'**.

- It is capable of delivering multiple types of warheads **up to a range of 290 kilometres**.
- Earlier, **Shaheen-3, Babur cruise missile and the Fatah-1** were launched.

Key Points

- **Ballistic Missile:**
 - It is a **rocket-propelled self-guided strategic-weapons system** that follows a ballistic trajectory to deliver a payload from its launch site to a predetermined target.
 - It can carry **conventional high explosives as well as chemical, biological, or nuclear munitions**.
 - The **International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (ICOC)**, now known as the **Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC)**, is a political initiative aimed at globally curbing ballistic missile proliferation.
 - **India is a signatory** to this convention.
 - Established in April 1987, the voluntary **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.
 - **India has joined** the MTCR.
- **Some of India's Ballistic Missiles:**
 - **Agni P missile**
 - **Shaurya missile**
 - **Prithvi missile**
 - **Dhanush, etc.**

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. International Youth Day, 2021

Why in News

Every year, International Youth Day is observed on **12th August** to recognise and bring attention to the problems faced by the youth.

- **National Youth Day** is held every year on **12th January** to observe the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda**.

Key Points

- **History:**
 - In 1999, the **United Nations** decided to commemorate International Youth Day every year on this day.
 - It was **based on a recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth** in Lisbon to the UN General Assembly.
 - The **first International Youth Day** was observed on **12th August, 2000**.
- **Theme for 2021:**
 - Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health.
- **Challenges in Realising Youth Potential:**
 - **Lack of Education and Skill:** India's **underfunded education system** is inadequately equipped to **provide the skills** young people need to take **advantage of emerging employment opportunities**.
 - According to the **World Bank**, public expenditure on education constituted **only 3.4% of GDP in 2020**.
 - **Impact of the Pandemic:** Various studies show that school closures have a serious impact on the learning, lives and mental well-being of children.
 - A survey by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** reveals that 65% of adolescents worldwide reported having learnt less during the pandemic.
 - **Issues of Young Women:** Child marriage, gender-based violence, their vulnerability to abuse and trafficking, especially if primary caregivers

fall ill or die. All these issues restrict young women to achieve their full potential.

- **Jobless Growth:** The main contributor in India's GDP is the service sector which is not labour intensive and thus adds to jobless growth.
 - Further about 50% of India's population is still dependent on agriculture which is notorious for underemployment and disguised unemployment.
- **Low Social Capital:** Further **high levels of hunger, malnutrition, stunting** among children, high levels of anaemia among adolescent girls, poor sanitation etc., have reduced the productivity of India's youth in realising their potential.
- **India's Initiatives:**
 - **National Youth Policy-2014** provides a holistic Vision for the youth of India which is "to empower the youth of the country to achieve their full potential, and through them enable India to find its rightful place in the community of nations".
 - **For Employment:**
 - **Generation Unlimited in India (YuWaah)**
 - **National Career Service**
 - **Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)**
 - **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA)**
 - **For Skill Development:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana**
 - **YUVA: Prime Minister's Scheme For Mentoring Young Authors**
 - **For Social Issues:**
 - **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**
 - **Special Marriage Act, 1954**
 - **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**
 - **For Health and Nutrition:**
 - **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme**
 - **National Health Mission (NHM)**
- **Global Initiatives:**
 - **World Programme of Action for Youth**
 - **Global Youth Summit**
 - **Global youth skills day**

Way Forward

- With a **young population of 365 million (30%)**, India's demographic dividend – the economic advantage of a large working-age population – is enormous.
- India must **ensure a healthy young population** by making efforts to improve access to adolescent-friendly healthcare facilities, gainful employment and nutrition as a critical step to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

2. India Needs an Updated Flood Map

Why in News

Recent **occurrences of heavy rainfall** leading to flooding across India have **shown that flood-prone areas in the country go beyond those mentioned in the central monitoring map**.

- The **shift in the flooding patterns and frequencies demands an updated map** of flood-prone areas, factoring in the impacts of **climate change**.

Flood Prone Areas According to NDMA

Key Points

- **Flood Prone Areas in India:**
 - Regions susceptible to floods, according to the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**, lie **mostly along the Ganga-Brahmaputra river basin**, from the northern states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, covering Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and stretching to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast.
 - The **coastal states of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh**, parts of **Telangana and Gujarat** also witness yearly floods.
- **Need of a New Map:**
 - **Old Estimation:**
 - The current demarcation is based on estimates made in 1980 by **Rashtriya Barh Ayog (RBA)** or **National Flood Commission** formed four decades ago.
 - **National Flood Commission**, was set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in **1976**, to study India's flood-control measures after the projects launched under the **National Flood Control Programme of 1954** failed to achieve much success.
 - **Around 40 million hectares of the geographical area in India is vulnerable to floods**, according to the RBA.

- RBA also ascribed the floods to purely anthropogenic factors and not heavy downpours.
- **Climate Change:**
 - Over the last four decades, **India has been reeling from the effects of climate change.** The **global rise in temperatures has led to large periods of no rain** followed by extreme precipitation.
 - **Extreme rainfall events have tripled** in central India between 1950 and 2015, according to the science journal Nature.
 - There will be a **rise in the frequency of floods in India due to rising temperatures between 2070 and 2100**, according to **Climate Change and India**, a report by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest.
- **Increased Downpour:**
 - In recent times, the **southwest monsoon** period has also been causing massing floods in parts of the country in recent years.
 - In 2020, **256 districts across 13 states in India reported floods** due to excess rainfall.

Flood

- It is an **overflowing of water onto land that is normally dry.** Floods can happen during heavy rains, when ocean waves come on shore, when snow melts quickly, or when dams or levees break.
- Damaging flooding may happen with only a few inches of water, or it may cover a house to the rooftop. **Floods can occur within minutes or over a long period, and may last days, weeks, or longer.** Floods are the **most common and widespread of all weather-related natural disasters.**
- **Flash floods are the most dangerous kind of floods, because they combine the destructive power of a flood with incredible speed.**
 - Flash floods occur **when heavy rainfall exceeds the ability of the ground to absorb it.**
 - They also occur **when water fills normally dry creeks or streams or enough water accumulates for streams to overtop their banks**, causing rapid rises of water in a short amount of time.
 - They can **happen within minutes of the causative rainfall**, limiting the time available to warn and protect the public.

National Disaster Management Authority

- **About:**
 - It is the **apex statutory body for disaster management in India.** It was formally **constituted in September 2006**, in accordance with the

Disaster Management Act, 2005 with the Prime Minister as its **Chairperson** and nine other members, and one such member to be designated as Vice-Chairperson.

- **Mandate:**
 - To **coordinate response to natural or man-made disasters** and for **capacity-building** in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
 - It is also the **apex body to lay down policies, plans and guidelines for Disaster Management** to ensure timely and effective response to disasters.
- **Vision:**
 - To **build a safer and disaster resilient India** by a holistic, proactive, technology driven and sustainable development strategy that **involves all stakeholders and fosters a culture of prevention, preparedness and mitigation.**

3. Vehicle Scrapping Policy Launched

Why in News

Recently, the Prime Minister while addressing the Investor Summit in Gujarat via video conferencing launched the **Vehicle Scrapping Policy/National Automobile Scrapage Policy.**

- The Summit will **invite investment for setting up vehicle scrapping infrastructure** under the Vehicle Scrapping Policy.
- The Vehicle Scrapping Policy was **announced in March 2021** by the government.
- The policy is estimated to cover **51 lakh Light Motor Vehicles (LMVs) that are above 20 years of age** and another **34 lakh LMVs above 15 years of age.**

Key Points

- **Aim:**
 - Reducing the population of old and defective vehicles, bringing down vehicular air pollutants, improving **road and vehicular safety.**
- **Provisions:**
 - **Fitness Test:**
 - **Old vehicles** will have to **pass a fitness test before re-registration** and as per the policy **government commercial vehicles more than 15 years old** and **private vehicles which are over 20 years old will be scrapped.**

- Old vehicles will be tested at authorized **Automated Fitness Center** and will **not be scrapped merely on the basis of age**.
 - Emission test, braking system, safety components will be tested and the vehicles which fail in the fitness test will be scrapped.
 - If the **old vehicle passes the test**, the owner can continue to use it, but the **charges for reregistration will be much steeper**.
 - The Union Road and Transport Ministry has also **issued rules for registration procedure for scrapping facilities**, their powers, and scrapping procedure to be followed.
- **Road Tax Rebate:**
 - The state governments may be advised to **offer a road-tax rebate of up to 25% for personal vehicles** and up to **15% for commercial vehicles to provide incentive to owners of old vehicles** to scrap old and unfit vehicles.
- **Vehicle Discount:**
 - Vehicle manufacturers will also give a **discount of 5% to people who will produce the 'Scrapping Certificate'** and registration fees will be waived off on the purchase of a new vehicle.
- **Disincentive:**
 - As a disincentive, **increased re-registration fees** would be applicable for **vehicles 15 years or older** from the initial date registration.
- **Significance:**
 - **Creation of Scrap yards:**
 - It will lead to **creation of more scrap yards** in the country and effective **recovery of waste from old vehicles**.
 - India had to **import 23,000 crore worth of scrap steel** during the last year as India's scrapping is not productive and **India is not able to recover energy and rare earth metals**.
 - **Employment:**
 - In the new fitness centers, **35 thousand people will get employment** and an investment of Rs 10,000 crores will be pumped in.
 - **Improved Revenue:**
 - This will **boost sales of heavy and medium commercial vehicles** that had been in the contraction zone as a result of economic slowdown triggered by the **bankruptcy of IL&FS** (Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services) and **Covid-19 pandemic**.
 - The government treasury is expected to get around Rs 30,000 to 40,000 crores of money through **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** from this policy.

- **Reduction in Prices:**
 - **Prices of auto components would fall** substantially with the recycling of metal and plastic parts.
 - As scrapped materials will get cheaper the production cost of the vehicle manufacturers will also reduce.
- **Reduce Pollution:**
 - It will play a **major role in modernising the vehicular population** as it will help in **phasing out the unfit and polluting vehicles** across the country and **promote a circular economy and waste to wealth campaign.**
 - As **older vehicles pollute the environment 10 to 12 times** more, and estimated that 17 lakh medium and heavy commercial vehicles are more than 15 years old.
- **Other Initiatives to Curb Vehicular Pollution:**
 - **Go Electric Campaign**
 - **FAME India Scheme Phase II.**
 - **Electric Vehicles (EV) Policy 2020 for Delhi.**
 - **Hydrogen Fuel Cell Based Bus and Car Project.**
 - **National Electric Mobility Mission 2020.**

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

4. Atmanirbhar Narishakti Se Samvad

Why in News

Recently, Prime Minister (PM) of India participated in 'Atmanirbhar Narishakti se Samvad' and interacted with women **Self Help Group (SHG)** members promoted under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**.

Key Points

- **Highlights of the Conference:**
 - The PM lauded the **Self-Help Groups of women** for their unprecedented services during the Covid-19 period.
 - For example, women's unparalleled contribution in **making masks and sanitizers** and **providing food** to the needy and **spreading awareness.**

- The PM released support funds to **SHGs**, for **PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM FME)** Scheme and for **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**.
- The PM also announced that now the **limit for loans available to SHGs without guarantee has been doubled to Rs 20 lakh**.
- In the pursuit of making the country **free from single use plastic**, SHGs can play an important role.
 - SHGs can raise awareness about single use plastic and work for its alternative.
 - In this context, SHGs can take full advantage of the online **Government e-marketplace**.
- **About Self-Help Groups (SHGs):**
 - SHGs are **informal associations of people** who choose to come together to find ways to improve their living conditions.
 - It can be defined as a **self governed, peer controlled information group** of people with **similar socio-economic background** and having a desire to collectively perform common purpose.
 - Villages face **numerous problems** related to poverty, illiteracy, lack of skills, lack of formal credit etc. These problems cannot be tackled at an individual level and **need collective efforts**.
 - Thus SHG can become a vehicle of change for the poor and marginalized. SHG relies on the notion of **“Self Help” to encourage self-employment and poverty alleviation**.
 - In 1999, Government of India, introduced **Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)** to promote self-employment in rural areas through formation and skilling of SHGs. The programme evolved as a national movement in 2011 and **became National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)**.
 - **Other Initiatives to Promote SHGs:**
 - **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund**
 - **PM Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM FME) Scheme**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**
 - **Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY)**
 - **North East Rural Livelihood Project**
 - **Scheme for promotion of Women SHGs (WSHGs) in backwards & LWE (Left Wing Extremism) districts of India.**
 - **The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has launched ‘SonChiraiya’** - (A brand and logo)- for marketing of urban SHG products. It also implements DAY-NULM (National Urban Livelihoods Mission).
- **Government Initiatives for Women Empowerment in Various Fields:**
 - **Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry:**

- Under the **new farm laws**, women self help groups have no restriction on how much they can store.
- Self help groups have the option whether to sell produce directly from the farm or by setting up a food processing unit and sell with great packaging.
- **Financial Inclusion:**
 - **Jan Dhan Accounts:** With more than 42 crore Jan Dhan accounts of which close to 55% of the accounts are of women.
 - **DAY-NRLM:** It envisages universal social mobilization by inter alia organising one-woman members from each rural poor household into Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- **Panchayats:**
 - **Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayat**
 - **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**
- **In Education:**
 - **Vigyan Jyoti Scheme**
 - **GATI Scheme**
 - **KIRAN Scheme**
 - **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme**
- **In Entrepreneurship:**
 - **Mahila e-haat**
 - **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)**
 - **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme**
 - **New Labour Code**
 - **The Prevention of Sexual Harassment At Workplace Act, 2013**
- **Other Initiatives:**
 - **National Creche Scheme**
 - **One Stop Centre Scheme**
 - **Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)' across the country**
 - **POSHAN Abhiyaan**
 - **Ujjwala Yojana**

5. Greater Adjutant Storks (Garuda)

Why in News

Recently, **Bihar** has decided to tag **greater adjutant storks** locally known as '**Garuda**' with **GPS trackers** to monitor their movement as part of efforts to conserve them.

Key Points

- **Scientific Name:** *Leptoptilos dubius*
- **Genus:**
 - The greater adjutant is a member of the **stork family, Ciconiidae**.
 - There are about **20 species in the family**.
 - They are **long-necked large birds**.
- **Habitat:**
 - **Once found across South and Southeast Asia**, the Greater Adjutant is one of the **most threatened stork species in the world**.
 - There are only three known breeding grounds - one in **Cambodia** and two in **India (Assam and Bihar)**.
- **Threat:**
 - The widespread **destruction and degradation** of the **wetlands** that this scavenger bird needs to forage (i.e. search for food) and the **loss of its nesting trees**, led to a decline.
- **Protection Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972:** Schedule IV
- **Significance:**
 - **Religious Icon:**
 - They are considered the **mount of Vishnu**, one of **Hinduism's prime deities**.
 - Some worship the bird and call it "**Garuda Maharaj**" (Lord **Garuda**) or "**Guru Garuda**" (Great Teacher **Garuda**).
 - **Helpful for Farmers:**
 - They help farmers by killing rats and other farm pests.

6.IndiGau

Why in News

Recently, **National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB)**, Hyderabad has launched a chip called **IndiGau**.

- It is **India's first Cattle Genomic Chip** for the conservation of pure varieties of indigenous cattle breeds like Gir, Kankrej, Sahiwal, Ongole etc.
- **NIAB** is an Indian autonomous research establishment of the **Department of Biotechnology**, Ministry of Science and Technology.

Key Points

- **About IndiGau:**
 - IndiGau is **purely indigenous and the largest cattle chip of the world**.

- The Chip to achieve the goal of conservation of our own breeds with better characters and help towards **doubling of farmers' income by 2022.**
- The manufacturing of this chip is in synergy with **Rashtriya Gokul Mission** and a great example of **Atmanirbhar Bharat.**
- Further, the chip exemplifies the application of scientific knowledge and innovations for **"Ease of Living"** for all sections of society.
- **Importance of Indigenous Breeds:**
 - Indigenous bovines are **robust and resilient** and are particularly suited to the climate and environment of their respective breeding tracts and productivity of indigenous breeds is less likely to be impacted by the adversities of climate change.
 - The milk of indigenous animals is **high in fat and SNF content.**
 - SNF content are the substances in milk other than butterfat and water in the form of casein, lactose, vitamins, and minerals which contribute significantly to the nutritive value of milk.

7. Ban on Single-Use Plastic

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry Of Environment Forest And Climate Change** has notified the **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021.**

- These rules prohibit specific **single-use plastic** items which have **"low utility and high littering potential"** by **2022.**

Key Points

- **About:**
 - **New Rules:**
 - The **manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of the identified single-use plastic will be prohibited** with effect from the 1st July, 2022.
 - The **ban will not apply to commodities made of compostable plastic.**
 - For banning other plastic commodities in the future, other than those that have been listed in this notification, the government has **given industry ten years** from the date of notification for compliance.
 - The **permitted thickness of the plastic bags**, currently 50 microns, **will be increased** to 75 microns from 30th September, 2021, and to 120 microns from the 31st December, 2022.

- **Plastic bags with higher thickness** are more easily handled as waste and have **higher recyclability**.
- **Legal Framework for Banning Plastic:** Currently, the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**, prohibits manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of **carry bags and plastic sheets less than 50 microns in thickness in the country**.
 - Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021 amend the 2016 rules.
- **Implementing Agency:** The **Central Pollution Control Board**, along with state pollution bodies, will monitor the ban, identify violations, and impose penalties already prescribed under the **Environmental Protection Act, 1986**.
- **Compostable Plastics:**
 - Instead of using plastic made from petrochemicals and fossil fuels, **compostable plastics are derived from renewable materials** like corn, potato, and tapioca starches, cellulose, soy protein, and lactic acid.
 - These are **non-toxic and decompose back into carbon dioxide, water, and biomass** when composted.
- **Single Use Plastics and Reasons for the Ban:**
 - Single-use plastics, or **disposable plastics**, are used **only once** before they are thrown away or recycled.
 - Plastic is **so cheap and convenient** that it has replaced all other materials from the packaging industry but it takes **hundreds of years to disintegrate**.
 - If we look at the data, out of **9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste** generated every year in our country, 43% is single use plastic.
 - Further, **Petroleum-based plastic is non biodegradable** and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
 - In the process of breaking down, it **releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic)** which make their way into our food and water supply.
 - Pollution due to single use plastic items has become an **important environmental challenge** confronting all countries and India is committed to take action for mitigation of pollution caused by littered Single Use Plastics.
 - At the **4th United Nations Environment Assembly in 2019**, India piloted a resolution on addressing single-use plastic products pollution.
 - The Prime Minister of India was also conferred the **“champions of the earth” award** by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** in 2018 for pledging to eliminate all single-use plastic by 2022.

Initiatives to Curb Plastic Waste

- **Swachh Bharat Mission**
- **India Plastics Pact**
- **Project REPLAN**
- **Un-Plastic Collective**
- **GoLitter Partnerships Project**

Way Forward

- **Sustainable Alternatives:** Economically affordable and ecologically viable alternatives which will not burden the resources needed and their prices will also come down with time and increase in demand.
 - Need to promote alternatives like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.
 - More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for it, are needed to look for sustainably viable options.
- **Circular Economy:** Countries must embrace **circular and sustainable economic** practices throughout the plastics value chain to reduce plastic pollution.
 - A circular economy **depends on reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling of resources** to create a closed-loop system, minimising the use of resources, generation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.
- **Behavioural Change:** Citizens have to bring behavioural change and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility:** At the policy level, the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), already mentioned under the 2016 Rules, has to be promoted.
 - EPR is a policy approach under which producers are given a significant responsibility - financial and/or physical - for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products.

8. Four New Ramsar Sites: India's Wetlands

Why in News

Recently, four more Indian sites - **two each from Haryana and Gujarat** - have been recognised as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

- Further, according to recent estimates by Wetlands International South Asia, nearly 30% of the natural wetlands in India have been lost in the last

three decades. Majorly, the loss of Wetlands is more prominent in Urban areas.

- **Wetlands International South Asia** was established in 1996, with an office in New Delhi, as a part of Wetlands International network to promote conservation and sustainable development of wetlands in the South Asia region.

Key Points

- **About Wetlands:**
 - Wetlands are **ecosystems saturated with water**, either seasonally or permanently.
 - They **include mangroves**, marshes, rivers, lakes, deltas, floodplains and flooded forests, rice-fields, **coral reefs**, marine areas no deeper than 6 metres at low tide, as well as human-made wetlands such as wastewater treatment ponds and reservoirs.
 - Though they **cover only around 6% of the Earth's land surface, 40% of all plant and animal species live or breed in wetlands.**

New Ramsar Sites

- Recently, the **Ramsar Convention** has designated four new wetlands in India, as wetlands of global importance. It is **an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.**
 - **Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary**, the largest wetland in **Haryana** is a human-made freshwater wetland.
 - **Sultanpur National Park** from **Haryana** supports more than 220 species of resident, winter migratory and local migratory waterbirds at critical stages of their life cycles.
 - **Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary** in **Gujarat** lies on the **Central Asian Flyway** and more than 320 bird species can be found here.
 - **Wadhvana Wetland from Gujarat** is internationally important for its birdlife as it provides wintering ground to migratory waterbirds, including over 80 species that migrate on the Central Asian Flyway.
- These wetlands are home to endangered bird species like Egyptian Vulture, Saker Falcon, Sociable Lapwing, and the near threatened Dalmatian Pelican.
- With this, the number of Ramsar sites in India are **46.**
- **Role of Urban Wetlands:**
 - **Historical Importance:** The value of wetlands, especially in urban settings, is evidenced through our history.
 - In southern India, the cholas, the Hoysalas built tanks all over the state.

- **Multi-layered Role:** Wetlands not only support high concentrations of biodiversity, but also offer a wide range of important resources and ecosystem services like food, water, fiber, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, storm protection, erosion control, carbon storage and climate regulation.
- **Liquid Assets of Cities:** They serve as special attributes contributing to the cultural heritage, and have deep connections with a city's ethos.
 - The value of wetlands in securing local livelihoods through activities such as fishing, farming and tourism, is incomparable.

Major Threats to Wetlands:

Urbanization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wetlands near urban centres are under increasing developmental pressure for residential, industrial and commercial facilities.
Anthropogenic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Due to unplanned urban and agricultural development, industries, road construction, impoundment, resource extraction and dredge disposal, wetlands have been drained and transformed, causing substantial economic and ecological losses in the long term.
Agricultural activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Following the Green Revolution of the 1970s, vast stretches of wetlands have been converted to paddy fields. ▪ Construction of a large number of reservoirs, canals and dams to provide for irrigation significantly altered the hydrology of the associated wetlands.
Hydrologic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construction of canals and diversion of streams and rivers to transport water to lower arid regions for irrigation has altered the drainage pattern and significantly degraded the wetlands of the region. ▪ Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, Loktak Lake, Chilika Lake, Vembanad Kole are among those severely impacted by dams that affect water and silt flows.
Deforestation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of vegetation in the catchment leads to soil erosion and siltation.
Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unrestricted dumping of sewage and toxic chemicals from industries has polluted many freshwater wetlands.

Salinization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over withdrawal of groundwater has led to salinization.
Aquaculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand for shrimps and fishes has provided economic incentives to convert wetlands and mangrove forests to develop pisciculture and aquaculture ponds.
Introduced species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian wetlands are threatened by exotic introduced plant species such as water hyacinth and salvinia. They clog waterways and compete with native vegetation.
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased air temperature; shifts in precipitation; increased frequency of storms, droughts, and floods; increased atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration; and sea level rise could also affect wetlands.

▪ **Issues in Wetland Conservation:**

- Major regulatory bodies like the **Central Wetland Regulatory Authority** had limited impact as they **only have advisory powers**.
- Additionally, existing laws **ignore the participation of local communities** in governing and monitoring wetlands.
- Further, cities are unable to cater to the water demand due to a policy vacuum as there is **no well-defined 'National Urban Water Policy'** to guide urban water management.
- In addition to urbanisation needs, lack of awareness and knowledge on wetlands and their ecosystem services can be blamed for this widespread loss.

Global Wetland Conservation Initiatives

- **The Ramsar convention**
- **Montreux Record**
- **World Wetland Day**
- **Cities4Forests global campaign:** It works closely with cities around the world to connect with forests, emphasizes the importance of wetlands and their multiple benefits to help combat climate change and protect biodiversity in cities.

Conservation Efforts by India

- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)**
- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**

- ISRO carried out the **National Wetland Inventory and Assessment** using remote sensing satellites from 2006 to 2011 and mapped around two lakh wetlands in India.

Way Forward

- **Developing Synergy With Mega Urban Schemes:** The ecosystem services of wetlands need to be highlighted in our development policies, urban planning and climate change mitigation.
 - In this context, mega urban schemes like **Smart Cities Mission** and **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation** need to add the aspects of sustainable management of wetlands.
- **Enabling People's Participation:** The **Delhi Development Authority** invited public comments on **Master Plan Delhi 2041** to protect and develop an integrated network of 'green and blue assets' of Delhi to maintain the biodiversity and microclimate of the capital.
 - The '**green-blue policy**', refers to where water bodies and land are interdependent, growing with the help of each other, while offering environmental and social benefits.
 - Similarly, **Swamini' self-help group** of ten women have been organising '**mangrove safari**' for tourists in the Mandavi creek in Maharashtra since 2017. This has been recognised as a **model for community-led conservation** through ecotourism.
- The multiple benefits and services provided by wetlands are essential to achieve the ambitious agenda for building resilient cities to achieve our **sustainable development goals**, while accommodating further development and eradicating poverty.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. With reference to the 'Palermo Convention', consider the following statements:

1. It is an United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime.
2. The protocol aimed at protecting and assisting victims of human trafficking.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer :C

Explanation

- The **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)**, also called the **Palermo Convention**) is an United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - It was adopted in Palermo in Italy in 2000, entered into force in 2003.
 - The idea behind having an international convention against organized crime was that if crimes could cross borders, so must law enforcement.
 - India joined UNTOC in 2002.
- This protocol is the **first global legally binding instrument** with an agreed definition on trafficking in persons. In addition the **protocol aimed at protecting and assisting victims of human trafficking. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

2. Which of the given statements best describes the "Monroe Doctrine"?

- a. A revenue rule introduced by Sir Thomas Monroe as the Governor of Madras in 1820.
- b. A U.S Foreign Policy regarding domination of the American continent in 1823.
- c. US military doctrine towards China and East Asia, crafted in 2018.
- d. Annexation policy applied by the British East India Company in India until 1859.

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Monroe Doctrine was a key part of U.S. foreign policy issued in 1823 by President James Monroe. It stated that North and South America were no longer open to colonization.
- It also declared that the United States would not allow European countries to interfere with independent governments in the Americas and it treated any such intervention by external powers in the politics of the Americas as a potentially hostile act against the US.

3. With reference to the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees 1951, Consider the following statements:

1. It defines refugees as foreign nationals who enter the country without valid travel documents.
2. India is a signatory to this convention.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C Both 1 and 2
- D Neither 1 and 2

Answer : D

Explanation

- Under the **1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and the subsequent 1967 Protocol** gives the definition of a refugee.
 - According to it, the word refugee pertains to **any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution** for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
 - However, the foreign nationals who enter the country without valid travel documents are treated as **illegal migrants. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- India is **not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention** relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereon. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

4. Which one of the following objectives is not embodied in the Preamble to the Constitution of India?

- a. Liberty of thought
- b. Economic liberty
- c. Liberty of expression
- d. Liberty of belief

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A preamble is an introductory statement in a document that explains the document's philosophy and objectives. In a Constitution, it presents the intention of its framers, the history behind its creation, and the core values and principles of the nation.

5. Ningbo Port, often seen in the news recently, is situated in?

- a. Sea of Japan
- b. East China Sea
- c. South China Sea
- d. Strait of Malacca

Answer : b

- China has partially shut down the world's third-busiest container port after a worker there tested positive for COVID-19.
- The Meishan terminal at Ningbo-Zhoushan port, which is south of Shanghai, accounts for over a fourth of the container cargo handled at the Chinese port.
- The closure could potentially threaten global supply chains and impact maritime trade.
- The port is located on the coast of the East China Sea.

6. Which of the following is the nodal agency for landslide studies in India?

- a. Geological Survey of India
- b. National Disaster Management Authority
- c. National Institute of Public Finance and Policy
- d. Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council

Answer : a

- The Geological Survey of India (GSI), an attached office under the Ministry of Mines (MoM), is the nodal agency for landslide studies in India providing quality geo-scientific information in order to minimize loss of life and damage to property from landslide hazards.

The Landslide Hazard Zonation Map of India marks over 70% of the State as 'high risk' and 14% as 'severe' to 'very high risk'.



Mains Practice Questions

1Q. Himalaya may be entering a phase of irreversible decline because of losses to its ecology. Discuss in the light of frequent disasters in the region. (250 Words)

Approach

- Introduce by giving some examples of frequent disasters taking place in the region.
- Discuss the threat/ losses to the Himalayan ecology.
- Enumerate some of the steps taken to save the ecology and reduce the occurrence of frequent natural disasters.

2Q. Examine the contribution of Ambedkar in awakening Dalit consciousness. (150 words)

Approach

- Briefly introduce about Ambedkar and his works.
- Elaborate the contribution of Ambedkar in awakening Dalit consciousness.
- Give conclusions.