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GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. India at BRICS Digital Health Summit

In News :

Digital Health has become the priority in wake of COVID 19 Pandemic. The two waves presented us with unique challenges for which an effective and humane centralized response sensitive to regional needs was warranted. The Digital health was aptly utilized to manage the pandemic and enabled us for a much more scientific and data driven approach for strengthening our response. India's **National Digital Health Blueprint** is an overarching architectural framework for digital initiatives of Health in India. We are implementing the recommendations for streamlining the digital health programmes through **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)**.

- NDHM through the issue of Unique Health ID will create a single source of truth for facilities and practitioners and lead to extension of various health services through digital mode. India's immediate field level priorities for creating an ecosystem of Digital Health includes Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) implementation in all district hospitals for real time clinical management, affordable and accessible medical consultation to every citizen through telemedicine and establishing a framework for health disaster management integrating all stakeholders.
- On the creation of a pool of human resource for managing pandemic digitally, the Minister showcased how India **leveraged iGoT (online training platform)** to train more than 16 million COVID warriors across the spectrum to manage COVID which includes doctors, paramedic, nurses, community participants etc.
- BRICS digital health platform is the need of the hour to ensure health data availability across BRICS countries in an interoperable manner to ensure continuum of care
- India has priorities towards full adoption of digital health technologies at all levels and BRICS's strategy in building a cadre of competent health informatics professionals using a standardized curriculum across BRICS countries.
- India's expectations from the development of a repository of evidence based digital technologies and innovations for health systems (under BRICS) and India's strategic approach to sustain the gains from use of digital innovations

during COVID-19 in a sustainable manner towards building health systems resilience was also discussed.

- Ability of the platform to leverage existing organizations and their experience like Global Digital Health Partnership, World Health Organization, G20 etc. and policy advocacy for wider as well as appropriate adoption of Digital Technologies not limiting to BRICS Countries was envisioned as India's key expectation from this platform.
- We initiated a robust mechanism through a national Covid portal which integrated surveillance, testing, logistic management, data driven analytics etc.
- We popularized Arogya Setu and **ITIHAS application - Digital Surveillance Application** to source data from citizens and to predict the upcoming hotpots in the community.
- Arogya Setu became one of the most downloaded application with more than 201 million downloads.
- Similarly, to take health services to the doorstep of citizen, we are augmenting the **National telemedicine platform (eSanjeevani) of India** and establishing telemedicine HUBs with dedicated doctors in all Districts. The HUBs will serve all facilities in their region, for both Covid & non Covid health care support.
- India is leveraging the Disease Surveillance Programme through an Integrated Health Information Platform which source real time data from facilities on 33 Epidemic Prone Diseases for community surveillance. India is undertaking the World's largest vaccine drive and the whole effort is being managed through digital tool, Co-WIN (Winning over COVID).
- **Co-WIN has been declared as a global good by Government of India** for adoption by any country for managing their vaccination drive, not only limiting to COVID but for conventional immunization also.
- In presence of honorable Health Ministers of BRICS nations, **BRICS Digital Health Declaration** was adopted.
- **India being the host of the BRICS Digital Health Summit**, the conclave was presided by Union Health Secretary Shri Rajesh Bhushan who brought focus to the wide adoption of digital health in the COVID-19 Pandemic on the spectrum that includes population surveillance, active case finding, communication with common citizens in crisis.
- The embarking of nations on digital technology in embracing primary universal health coverage was highlighted.

2. IT Rules 2021 for Social Media & OTT Platforms

Context :

- The government has notified guidelines to provide a **grievance redressal mechanism** for users of digital platforms of all kinds – **social media sites, messaging apps, over-the-top (OTT) streaming services, and digital news publishers.**
- The **Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** also mandate that social media and messaging platforms will have to adhere to new requirements in assisting investigative agencies of the government.

Rules for Social media intermediaries

Although there is no single set of rules that uniformly applies to the different kinds of digital platforms.

- **Grievance Officer: Social media platforms** like Google or Facebook, or intermediaries, for instance, will now have to appoint a grievance officer to deal with users' complaints.
- **Chief Compliance Officer:** There are additional requirements on '**significant' social media intermediaries** – meaning the platforms whose registered users in India are above the threshold notified by the government. Such intermediaries have to appoint a 'Chief Compliance Officer', who will have to ensure that the rules are followed; the officer "shall be liable in any proceedings relating to any relevant third-party information, data or communication link made available or hosted by that intermediary".
- **Nodal contact person:** The intermediaries will also have to appoint a nodal contact person for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- **Identification of 1st originator:** The other key requirement is that such a social media intermediary would have to "enable the identification of the first originator of the information on its computer resource" as may be required by a **judicial order.**
 - In other words, a problematic message, that is considered "an offence related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, or public order, or of incitement to an offence relating to the above or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material", will have to be traced to its initiator on messaging applications like WhatsApp and Signal.

Rules for digital publishers

- **3 tier Grievance Redressal mechanism:** For digital publishers of **news and current affairs** as well as **video streaming services**, an identical three-tier structure for grievance redressal has been mandated.
 - This structure will look into grievances in relation to a **Code of Ethics**, which is listed in the appendix to the rules.
- **Code of Ethics:** Among other things, the Code of Ethics includes the '**Norms of Journalistic Conduct**' as prescribed by the **Press Council of India**, as also **content that shall not be published** – “content which is prohibited under any law for the time being in force shall not be published or transmitted”, and the **Programme Code** under the **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995**.
- **Classification of content:** The guidelines also require streaming services to classify content based on its nature and type.
 - So, for instance, content “for persons aged 16 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 16 years with parental guidance shall be classified as U/A 16+”.

Context in which these rules have been framed

- The issue came up last year when the Supreme Court was hearing a case involving **Sudarshan TV**.
- In the course of the case, it asked the government for suggestions to improve the **self-regulatory mechanism for electronic media**. The government, in its affidavit, highlighted the need to regulate web-based media.
- There has also been a face-off between the government and Twitter in recent weeks over the social media platform's non-compliance with its order to block several hashtags and handles of journalists, activists and politicians in the backdrop of the ongoing farmers' protests. Twitter eventually complied, though not fully.
- Questions about how social media platforms can be made accountable for the **spread of fake news and pornographic content** have been raised in Parliament and by the Supreme Court in recent years, something that has been highlighted by the government in its release as well.

What has changed from earlier?

- The scope of regulation of the digital space has been expanded.
- The new guidelines not only **replace the Information Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines) Rules, 2011**, but go a step further.

- They also **regulate digital news publishers and streaming services**, which was not the case earlier. The 2011 rules were a narrower set of guidelines for intermediaries.
- Under **Section 79 of the Information Technology Act**, the intermediaries are not liable for user-generated content, provided they adhere to the rules – “an intermediary shall not be liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him,” it states. These rules have been tightened now.

Why the rules being criticised?

- **Strict government regulation:** For digital news media, these guidelines will subject it to governmental regulation in a way.
 - The three-tier structure of regulation will entail oversight by a government committee at the highest level. Any grievance that does not get satisfactorily solved at the self-regulatory levels will get escalated to the government panel.
 - The **Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF)**, a digital liberties organisation, refers to this as “excessive governmental control over digital news and OTT content”.
- **Traceability of Originator:** The other rule that has been criticised by the IFF is the requirement of traceability of the originator of a problematic message.
 - The news guidelines do suggest that this will not be required “where other less intrusive means are effective in identifying the originator of the information”.
 - **Censorship and surveillance:** The rules have also been criticised for increasing the potential for censorship and surveillance.

3. Afghan exit- not the end of the road for the U.S.

In News

The debate has abruptly shifted to the future of the United States after its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Background of the US presence in Afghanistan

- The terrorist attacks of 9/11, which was a game-changing global experience, led the U.S. to enter Afghanistan.
- The terrorist attacks transformed the geopolitics of the world.

- The most powerful country in the world, which had the capacity to destroy the world many times over, became powerless before a few terrorists.
- Once the responsibility of the attack was traced to Osama bin Laden and the terrorists in Afghanistan, it was imperative for the U.S. to retaliate by overthrowing the Taliban regime.

How US presence in Afghanistan benefited the region

- After accomplishing its mission the US was not able to withdraw because the Afghanistan government was unable to withstand the onslaught of the Taliban and other terrorist groups.
- Even **neighbouring countries, including India**, were strongly in favour of continuing the American presence.
- The US presence helped to provide a certain **stability for Afghanistan**.
- The result of their presence was the **prevalence of relative peace in the region** except that Pakistan fattened the Taliban with American largesse.
- The U.S. presence in Afghanistan had succeeded in **containing the dangers of terrorism for two decades**.

Way forward for the US and the rest of the world

- The US is still the most powerful economic and military power around which the whole constellation of the world rotates.
- **Democratic world leadership:** The world has a stake in ensuring that a democratic nation leads the world rather than an expansionist dictatorship which has no public opinion to restrain it.
- **Maintain the US leadership:** The free world has a responsibility to maintain the American leadership of the world till a wiser and more benign alternative is found.

Conclusion

Much has been written about a post-American world for some years now. But it looks that the demise of America, as Mark Twain said about the reports of his own death, is greatly exaggerated.

4. Glue Grant Scheme?

Forty Central universities will kick off the implementation of innovative measures such as the academic credit bank and the glue grant meant to encourage multidisciplinary in UG courses.

Glue Grant Scheme

- Under the glue grant, announced in this year's budget, institutions in the same city would be encouraged to share resources, equipment and even allow their students to take classes from each other.
- This is the first step for multidisciplinary.
- We intend to start this from the second semester of the current academic year.
- Ultimately, faculty will be able to design joint courses.
- This also meant that institutions need not duplicate work by developing the same capacities, but would be able to build on each other's expertise.

Credit bank

- The first step would be the academic credit bank, which would have to be adopted separately by the academic council of each university to kick off implementation.
- To start with, the system would allow students to attain qualifications by amassing credits rather than specific durations on campus.
- A certain number of credits would add up to a certificate, then a diploma and then a degree, allowing for multiple entry and exit points.
- Students can earn up to 40% of their credits in online Swayam classes, rather than in the physical classroom. In the future, these credits will hold validity across different institutions.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

5. Diversion of Fresh water from Brahmani river basin

- The massive diversion of fresh water from the Brahmani river basin could pose a grave threat to Bhitarkanika mangroves vegetation in Odisha.
- Bhitarkanika – a notified Ramsar wetland – is spread over 195 sq. km and is home to 62 mangrove species. Besides, 1,600 salt water crocodiles crawl on the mudflats of the Bhitarkanika mangrove forest.
- Mangroves grow in brackish water. Proportionate fresh water flow from the Brahmani river basin and the Kharasrota river keep the salinity level of the water along the shore down.
- The brackish water becomes ideal for the mangroves to grow and stay healthy.
- The Wildlife Society of Orissa (WSO), an environmental pressure group, had drawn public attention on the excess water allocation for industries, which is likely to reduce fresh water discharge to the sea.

- “The Talcher-Angul coal mines, steel and power plants as well as the Kalinganagar steel and power hub are drawing enormous quantities of fresh water from the Brahmani river,” said Biswajit Mohanty, secretary, WSO.
- “Against an available 4,400 mcum of fresh water stored by the Rengali reservoir, 4,318 mcum, that is almost equal to the available water supply shall be withdrawn from the river,” he said.
- According to the WSO secretary, 105 million litres, as per government claims, would be withdrawn for the mega drinking water project.
- Mr. Mohanty said, “The reduction in water flow would lead to drastic changes in the water regime of the Bhitarkanika mangroves. The Sunderbans mangrove forest was drastically affected after the Farraka barrage was commissioned.”
- Stating that the lack of normal flow of fresh water would increase saline ingression upstream, the WSO secretary said it would affect the local flora and fauna as well as the livelihoods of the farmers and fishermen.
- Besides, there could be a quantum increase in the man-crocodile conflict since the estuarine crocodiles would leave the core sanctuary area and migrate upstream once salinity increases, he said.

6. Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

In News : 24th meeting of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC).

- The **24th meeting deliberated on various mandates of the FSDC** such as financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination, financial literacy, financial inclusion, and macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates.

The council also discussed issues relating to

- Management of stressed assets,
- strengthening institutional mechanism for financial stability analysis,
- framework for resolution of financial institutions and issues related to IBC,
- data sharing mechanisms of government authorities,
- internationalisation of the Indian rupee and
- pension sector related issues.

About Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC):

- Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) was set up by the Government as the apex level forum in December 2010.
- The **Chairman of the Council is the Union Finance Minister** and its members include
 - The heads of financial sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA, IRDA & FMC)
 - Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs,
 - Secretary, Department of Financial Services, and
 - Chief Economic Adviser.
- The Council can invite experts to its meeting if required.

7. NASA's Perseverance rover

In News: NASA's Perseverance rover has successfully collected its first rock sample for return to Earth. NASA has called it a perfect core sample.

- NASA plans to launch more spacecraft to retrieve the samples collected by Perseverance.
- Perseverance arrived in February 2021 at **Mars' Jezero Crater**, the site on an ancient lake – **in search of rocks that might hold evidence of ancient life.**

Significance of the scheme

- It carried a unique instrument, **MOXIE or Mars Oxygen ISRU Experiment**: which for the first time manufactured molecular oxygen on Mars using carbon dioxide from the carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere (ISRU means In Situ Resource Utilization: or the use of local resources to meet human needs or requirements of the spacecraft).
- It carried Ingenuity, the first ever helicopter to fly on Mars.
- It is the **planned first step to bring back rock samples from Mars** for analysis in sophisticated laboratories on Earth: with the goal of looking for biosignatures: or signatures of present or past life.

These are some of the key mission objectives:

- Look for signs of ancient microbial life.
- Collect Martian rock and dust samples for later return to Earth.
- Deliver an experimental helicopter.
- Study the climate and geology of Mars.
- Demonstrate technology for future Mars missions.

What is the reason for the near-term interest in Mars?

- Mars is located in the very near backyard (about 200 million km away).
- It is a planet that humans can aspire to visit or to stay for a longer duration.
- Mars had flowing water and an atmosphere in the distant past: and perhaps conditions to support life.
- It also has implications for commercial travel.

8. Edible oil prices likely to ease by December: official

In News:

- Edible oil price has reached a new high (up by 48% from the previous year) in 2021 due to various reasons. But, the prices are likely to soften by December as recent international commodity futures show a declining trend, and there is the arrival of domestic oilseed crops.

Background:

- With rising incomes and changing food habits, consumption of edible oils has been rising over some years.
- In 2019-20, domestic availability of edible oils from both primary sources (oilseeds like mustard, groundnut, etc.) and secondary sources (such as coconut, oil palm, rice bran oil, cottonseed) was only **10.65 million tonnes** against the total domestic demand of 24 million tonnes.
- As a result of this, India currently imports about 60% of its edible oil needs, leaving the country's retail prices vulnerable to international pressures.

Reasons for soaring edible oil prices:

- Edible oil is also used for making **biofuel** and many countries are pursuing biofuel policy. This leads to aggressive edible oil purchase sourcing from palm oil (Malaysia and Indonesia) and soybean (U.S). These two oils make up 50% of India's domestic consumption.
- Another reason includes the excessive buying of edible oil by China. Thus, it has created a supply-demand mismatch in the market.
- Lastly, the Government has maintained high import duty (including cess) to manage the fiscal resources strained due to the covid-19 pandemic.

Steps taken to contain edible food oil price:

- Recently the government has launched a scheme called **National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)**, for self-reliance in edible oil involving an investment of over Rs. 11,000 crore (over a five year period).

Aims of the scheme:

- To rein in **domestic edible oil prices** that are dictated by expensive palm oil imports.
- To raise **the domestic production of palm oil** by three times to 11 lakh MT by 2025-26.
- This will also involve **raising the area under oil palm cultivation to 10 lakh hectares by 2025-26 and 16.7 lakh hectares by 2029-30.**

Features:

- The **special emphasis of the scheme will be on India's north-eastern states and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** due to the conducive weather conditions in the regions.
- Under the scheme, **oil palm farmers will be provided financial assistance and will get remuneration under a price and viability formula.**

Conclusion

High dependence of edible oil on import makes both the country and the citizens vulnerable to international trends. It also hinders the manoeuvrability of foreign policy as last year India was forced to import palm oil from Malaysia even after having strained relations with the country. Hence being Atmanirbhar in edible oil should be the first priority of both central and state governments.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. 6th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) session

- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi delivered a video-address during the plenary session of the 6th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) held on 3 September 2021 in Vladivostok.
- It may be recalled that PM was the Chief Guest for the 5th EEF in 2019, the first by an Indian Prime Minister.
- In Indian history and civilization the word 'Sangam' has a special meaning. It means confluence or coming together of rivers, people or ideas. In my view, Vladivostok is truly a 'Sangam' of Eurasia and the Pacific.
- Applauding President Putin's vision for the development of the Russian Far East, PM reiterated India's commitment as part of its 'Act East Policy' of being a reliable partner of Russia in this regard.
- In 2019, India committed to an "Act Far East" policy. This policy is an important part of our special and privileged strategic partnership with Russia.
- He underlined the natural complementarities of India and Russia in the development of Russian Far East.
- PM stressed on the importance of greater economic and commercial engagement between the two sides in line with the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.
- Mazagon Docks Limited will partner with 'Zvezda' for construction of some of the most important commercial ships in the world.
- India and Russia are partners in space exploration through the Gaganyaan program.
- India and Russia will also be partner in opening of the Northern Sea Route for international trade and Commerce.
- The friendship between India and Russia has stood the test of time. Most recently it was seen in our robust cooperation during the Covid-19 pandemic including in the area of vaccines. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the health and pharma sectors in our bilateral cooperation.
- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas Mr Hardeep Puri is in Vladivostok to represent India at this forum Indian workers are participating in major gas projects in the Amur region, from Yamal to Vladivostok and onward to Chennai. We envisage an energy and trade bridge known as Chennai - Vladivostok Maritime Corridor.

- This connectivity project along with the International North- South Corridor will bring India and Russia physically closer to each other.
- India has long term supply of coking coal to the Indian steel industry.
- We are also exploring new opportunities in agro industry, ceramics, strategic and rare earth minerals and diamonds.
- He also referred to other potential areas of economic cooperation including diamond, coking coal, steel, timber etc.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

2. 24th FSDC Meeting

- Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman chaired the 24th meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) here today.
- The meeting was attended by (PT Pointers for Banking and State PSC Exams)
 1. Dr. Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, MoS (Finance);
 2. Shri Pankaj Chaudhary, MoS (Finance);
 3. Shri Shaktikanta Das, Governor, Reserve Bank of India;
 4. Dr. T. V. Somanathan, Finance Secretary and Secretary, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance;
 5. Shri Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance;
 6. Shri Tarun Bajaj, Secretary, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance;
 7. Shri Debasish Panda, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance;
 8. Shri Rajesh Verma, Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs;
 9. Dr. Krishnamurthy V. Subramanian, Chief Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance;
 10. Shri Ajay Tyagi, Chairperson, Securities and Exchange Board of India;
 11. Shri Supratim Bandyopadhyay, Chairperson, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority;
 12. Dr. M. S. Sahoo, Chairperson, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India; Shri Injeti Srinivas, Chairperson, International Financial Services Centres Authority;
 13. Ms. T. L. Alamelu, Member (Non-Life), Insurance and Regulatory Development Authority of India; and the
 14. Secretary of the FSDC, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.

- The meeting deliberated on the various mandates of the FSDC, viz., Financial Stability, Financial Sector Development, Inter-regulatory Coordination, Financial Literacy, Financial Inclusion, and Macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates etc.
- It was noted that there is a need to keep a continuous vigil by Government and all regulators on the financial conditions.
- The Council also, inter alia, discussed issues relating to management of stressed assets, strengthening institutional mechanism for financial stability analysis, financial inclusion, framework for resolution of financial institutions and issues related to IBC processes, banks' exposure to various sectors and Government, data sharing mechanisms of government authorities, internationalisation of Indian Rupee and pension sector related issues.
- The Council also took note of the activities undertaken by the FSDC Sub-Committee chaired by the Governor, RBI and the action taken by members on the past decisions of FSDC.

3. Edible Oil Prices

In News: Edible oil prices are likely to reduce by December as international commodity futures show a declining trend and the production of domestic oilseed crops.

Recent Rise in the prices of Edible Oil:

- Last year, the retail prices of six edible oils – groundnut, mustard, vanaspati, soya, sunflower, and palm oil had risen up to 48%. This was due to
 - Surge in global prices, and lower domestic production of soybean which is India's largest oilseed crop.
 - Excessive buying of edible oil by China.
 - Many major oil producers are aggressively pursuing biofuel policies and diverting their edible oil crops for that purpose.
 - Governmental taxes and duties also make up a major chunk of the retail price of edible oils in India.

India's Dependence on Edible Oil:

- India is the world's biggest vegetable [oil importer](#).
- India imports about 60% of its edible oil needs, leaving the country's retail prices vulnerable to international pressures.

- It imports palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyoil from Brazil and Argentina, and sunflower oil, mainly from Russia and Ukraine.

Facts about Edible Oils:

- Primary sources of Edible oil (Soybean, Rapeseed & Mustard, Groundnut, Sunflower, Safflower & Niger) and secondary sources of Edible Oil (Oil palm, Coconut, Rice Bran, Cotton seeds & Tree Borne Oilseeds).
- In India **major challenges** in oilseed production is
 - Growing in largely rain-fed conditions (around 70% area),
 - high seed cost (Groundnut and Soybean),
 - small holding with limited resources,
 - low seed replacement rate and low productivity.

4. Mu variant of coronavirus

In News: World Health Organization (WHO) has classified another SARS-CoV-2 variant – B.1.621 – as a variant of interest (VOI) and has called it Mu variant.

- The four other variants of interest are Eta, Iota, Kappa and Lambda.
- Mu variant was first found in Colombia in January 2021, and has been found in about 39 countries so far.
- There have been few reported cases of the Mu variant and some larger outbreaks have been reported from countries in South America and in Europe.

What is Variant of interest (VOI)

- A VOI is classified based on factors such as genetic changes that affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, disease severity, immune escape etc.
- A VOI represents a lower level of concern than a variant of concern (VOC) such as Alpha, Beta, Gamma and
- Variant of concern are associated with factors such as an increase in transmissibility or detrimental change in epidemiology, etc.

How do variants of a virus emerge and why?

- Variants of a virus have one or more mutations that differentiate it from the other variants that are in circulation.
- Essentially, the goal of the virus is to reach a stage where it can cohabitate with humans because it needs a host to survive.
- Errors in the viral RNA are called mutations, and viruses with these mutations are called variants. Variants could differ by a single or many mutations.

What is a mutation?

- A mutation means a change in the genetic sequence of the virus.
- In the case of SARS-CoV-2, which is a Ribonucleic acid (RNA) virus, a mutation means a change in the sequence in which its molecules are arranged.
- A mutation in an RNA virus often happens when the virus makes a mistake while it is making copies of itself.

5. Export efforts critical to growth in the coming quarters

In News

First-quarter growth in India's gross domestic product (GDP) stands at 20.1 %. This however still means that GDP in the first quarter was 9.2 % below its level two years ago.

Export: Challenges

- The key driver of growth in the coming quarters will be exports riding on the rapidity of recovery in major markets.
- There are two serious worries here.
- 1) Bullwhip element: This could cause an immediate ramp-up in demand for steel and other such upstream elements in global supply chains, with a corresponding damp down in the months to come.
- In this connection, although the rates under the scheme for remission of duties and taxes on exported products (RODTEP) were finally notified in mid-August.
- Steel, pharma and chemicals get no rebate at all, although many products using these inputs do.
- The scheme looks like a subsidy to selected sectors disguised as duty rollback, which can get India into trouble at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- These excluded products need the rebate if they are to survive in a fiercely price-competitive global market in the months to come.
- 2) Container shortage: A crippling shortage of sea-borne containers has afflicted key large-volume products in the Indian export basket (tea, basmati rice, furniture, garments).
- Sea-freight subsidy: At a time when container rates have shot up, there is surely a case for a sea-freight subsidy (for a limited period).
- Even more urgently, the estimated 25,000-30,000 containers locked up at different ports owing to customs disputes need to be unloaded into warehouses and these containers freed.

Can National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) spur growth?

- Even if the expected ₹88,000 crore of revenue under NMP is realized during the current year, it is intended to feed only a small part of the infrastructure expenditure budgeted for the year.
- It is the latter that will have to drive growth. Monetization is merely a funding source.
- The scheme offers a participation incentive to states with a 33% matching transfer from the Centre for revenues that states realize under the scheme.
- This matching transfer could well have the perverse consequence of states under-achieving the potential value realizable.
- Volume II of the NMP document refers to the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure announced in October 2020.
- It offered states an interest-free loan with bullet repayment after 50 years to complete stalled capital projects, or settle the outstanding bills of contractors.
- The NMP demands clear and well-thought-through processes, with sufficient transparency and safeguards in the form of regulatory structures.

Conclusion

For now, the need of the hour is export facilitation.

6. Common Prosperity Drive in China

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for China to achieve “common prosperity”, seeking to narrow a yawning wealth gap that threatens the country’s economic ascent and the legitimacy of Communist Party rule.

What is ‘Common Prosperity’?

- “Common prosperity” was first mentioned in the 1950s by Mao Zedong, founding leader of what was then an impoverished country.

- The idea was repeated in the 1980s by Deng Xiaoping, who modernized an economy devastated by the Cultural Revolution.
- Deng said that allowing some people and regions to get rich first would speed up economic growth and help achieve the ultimate goal of common prosperity.
- Common prosperity is not egalitarianism. It does not mean “killing the rich to help the poor”.

Components of the drive

- The push for common prosperity has encompassed wide range of policies,
- This includes curbing tax evasion and limits on the hours that tech sector employees can work to bans on for-profit tutoring in core school subjects and strict limits on the time minors can spend playing video games.

Why in news now?

- China became an economic powerhouse under a hybrid policy of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, but it also deepened inequality, especially between urban and rural areas, a divide that threatens social stability.
- This year, Xi has signalled a heightened commitment to delivering common prosperity, emphasizing it is not just an economic objective but core to the party’s governing foundation.
- A pilot programme in Zhejiang province, one of China’s wealthiest, is designed to narrow the income gap there by 2025.

How will it be achieved?

- Chinese leaders have pledged to use taxation and other income redistribution levers to expand the proportion of middle-income citizens, boost incomes of the poor, “rationally adjust excessive incomes”, and ban illegal incomes.
- Beijing has explicitly encouraged high-income firms and individuals to contribute more to society via the so-called “third distribution”, which refers to charity and donations.
- Several tech industry heavyweights have announced major charitable donations and support for disaster relief efforts.
- Other measures would include improving public services and social safety net.

What will be the economic impact?

- Chinese leaders are likely to tread cautiously so as not to derail a private sector that has been a vital engine of growth and jobs.

- This goal may speed China's economic rebalancing towards consumption-driven growth to reduce reliance on exports and investment, but policies could prove damaging to growth driven by private sector.
- Increasing incomes and improved public services, especially in rural areas, would be positive for consumption, and a better social safety net would lower precautionary savings.
- The effort supports Xi's "dual circulation" strategy for economic development, under which China aims to spur domestic demand, innovation and self-reliance, propelled by tensions with the United States.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Ashok Kumar Tandon Committee, sometimes seen in the news recently, was constituted for which of the following purposes?

- a. To probe Pegasus snooping issue
- b. To reform Journalists Welfare Schemes
- c. To suggest measures for Sustainable Fisheries Management
- d. To study the impact of traditional health practices in rural villages

Answer : b

Ashok Kumar Tandon Committee

- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has constituted a ten member Committee headed by Shri Ashok Kumar Tandon, renowned Journalist and Member, Prasar Bharati.
- The committee was tasked to take a look at the existing guidelines of Journalists Welfare Scheme of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The Journalists Welfare Scheme which has been in existence for a many years needs a relook from a futuristic perspective and broad basing the coverage for the benefit of the Journalists of this country.
- With the enactment of Occupational, Safety, Health and Working Condition Code 2020, the definition of the Working Journalists has been broadened to include within its fold those working in both traditional and digital media.

- Further, it was also considered necessary to look at the possible parity between accredited and non-accredited journalists from the perspective of welfare and availing of benefits under the scheme.

2. With respect to 1988 sanctions committee, sometimes seen in the news recently, consider the following statements:

1. The committee oversees the sanctions measures imposed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Al-Qaeda.
2. India will chair the 1988 sanctions committee for the period from 2021-22.

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 : b

- India will chair the crucial Taliban and Libya sanctions committees and the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the UN Security Council (UNSC) during its tenure as non-permanent member of the powerful 15-nation UN body. (2021-22).

1988 Sanctions Committee

- It was formed through resolution number 1988 in 2011 by splitting the 1267 sanctions regime on al-Qaeda.
- Resolution 1988 dealt with sanctions relating to the Taliban, while Resolution 1989 addressed sanctions on Al-Qaeda.
- Until the passing of both the resolutions, sanctions on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda had been handled by the same committee.
- The committee oversees the sanctions measures imposed by the Security Council on Talibans.
- Individuals and entities are designated on the 1988 Sanctions List as individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with the Taliban in constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan.
- The listed entities and individuals are subject to an assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

3. The 'Basel III norms' is associated with which of the following?

- A Banking Sector
- B Transfer of Hazardous Waste
- C Cybercrime
- D Administration of Criminal Justice

Answer : A

Explanation

- **Basel III Norms** is an international regulatory accord that introduced a set of reforms designed to **improve the regulation, supervision and risk management** within the **banking sector**, post 2008 financial crisis.
 - Under the Basel-III norms, banks were asked to maintain a certain minimum level of capital and not lend all the money they receive from deposits.
- According to Basel-III norms, banks' regulatory capital is divided into Tier 1 and Tier 2, while Tier 1 is subdivided into Common Equity Tier-1 (CET-1) and Additional Tier-1 (AT-1) capital.
- **Hence, option A is correct.**

4. Consider the following statements regarding the Union Territory of Ladakh:

1. The Kargil district of Ladakh is home to the Indus, Shyok and Nubra river valleys.
2. Naku La, where the recent India-China standoff took place along the LAC, is located in Ladakh.

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

- A 1 only
- B 2 only
- C 1 and 2
- D None

Answer : C

Explanation

- Ladakh was established as a Union Territory (UT) of India on 31st October 2019, following the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act.

- Before that, it was part of the Jammu and Kashmir state.
- It is the largest and the second least populous union territory of India.
- It **extends from the Siachen Glacier** in the Karakoram Range to the **north** to the **main Great Himalayas to the south. Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
 - The eastern end, consisting of the uninhabited Aksai Chin Plains, is claimed by the Indian Government as part of Ladakh, and has been under Chinese control since 1962.
- The largest town in Ladakh is Leh, followed by Kargil, each of which headquarters a district.
 - The **Leh district contains the Indus, Shyok and Nubra river valleys. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
 - The Kargil district contains the Suru, Dras and Zaskar river valleys.
- Earlier, in 2020 Indian and **Chinese troops were engaged in a temporary and short duration face-off** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at **Naku La (Sikkim) and near Pangong Tso Lake (Eastern Ladakh). Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**
 - However, recently India and China have agreed in principle to disengage at a key patrol point in eastern Ladakh.

5. With reference to the Inner Line Permit System, consider the following statements:

1. It is an official travel document that allows inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected/restricted area for a limited period.
2. It is applicable in all tribal areas of the country.

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

- **Inner Line Permit System** was Implemented under the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) 1873**, the ILP is an official travel document that allows inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected/restricted area for a limited period.

- This Act was enacted during the British era to protect the Crown's own commercial interests by preventing 'British subjects' (Indians) from trading within these regions. **Hence statement 1 is correct.**
- Under **Section 2 of the Regulation of 1873**, the ILP was only applicable to the **three North-Eastern States** viz. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.
 - On 11th December 2020, the President signed the order extending ILP to **Manipur, which became the fourth state where the ILP regime is applicable. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**

6. State of the Global Climate Provisional Report was released recently by?

- a. Green Peace International
- b. World Meteorological Organization
- c. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- d. Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Answer : b

State of the Global Climate Provisional Report

- This report was released by the World Meteorological Organization.
- The decade 2011-2020 would be the warmest ever on record.
- Also, the year 2020 is set to be among the three warmest on record.
- The record heat in 2020 has been despite La Niña conditions prevailing in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- Scientific evidence indicates increasing temperatures are a direct result of human-led global warming, an impact of Green House Gas emission.
- After record GHG levels of 2019, there has been a slight dip this year due to measures taken by countries to fight the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Global sea-level rise was similar to 2019 values and the general decreasing trend has continued.
- Extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, floods, heavy rainfall and droughts which are an expensive consequence of global warming impacted many parts of the world.
- The report states that climate induced human migration is one of the least understood impact of anthropogenic climate change.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1Q. The onset of the twentieth century marks a shift from middle-class intelligentsia towards masses in the national movement. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Introduce with overall nature of the national movement.
- Comment on a shift in national movement participation from middle-class intelligentsia towards masses during the onset of the twentieth century

2Q. What is Integrated farming System? How it can help in tackling the farmer's distress? (150 words)

Approach

- Write about Integrated farming System (IFS) in the introduction para.
- Explain how it can help in tackling the farmer's distress by writing IFS's features.